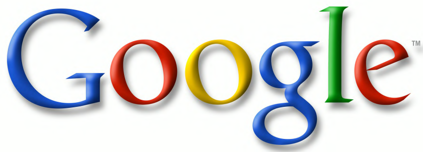

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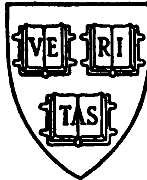

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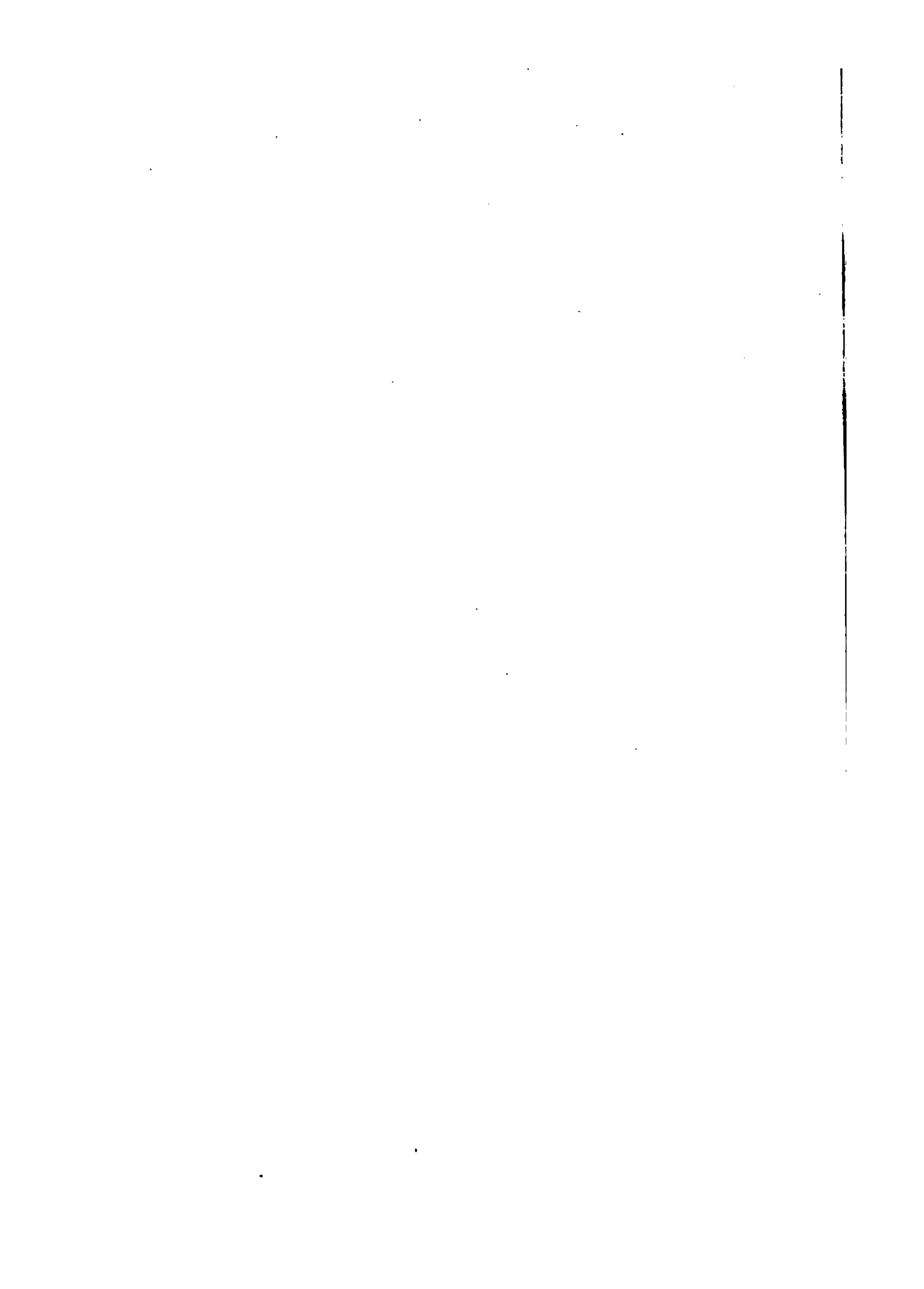

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ITALIAN LITERATURE

BY

F. J. SNELL, M.A.

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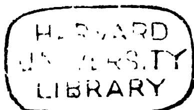

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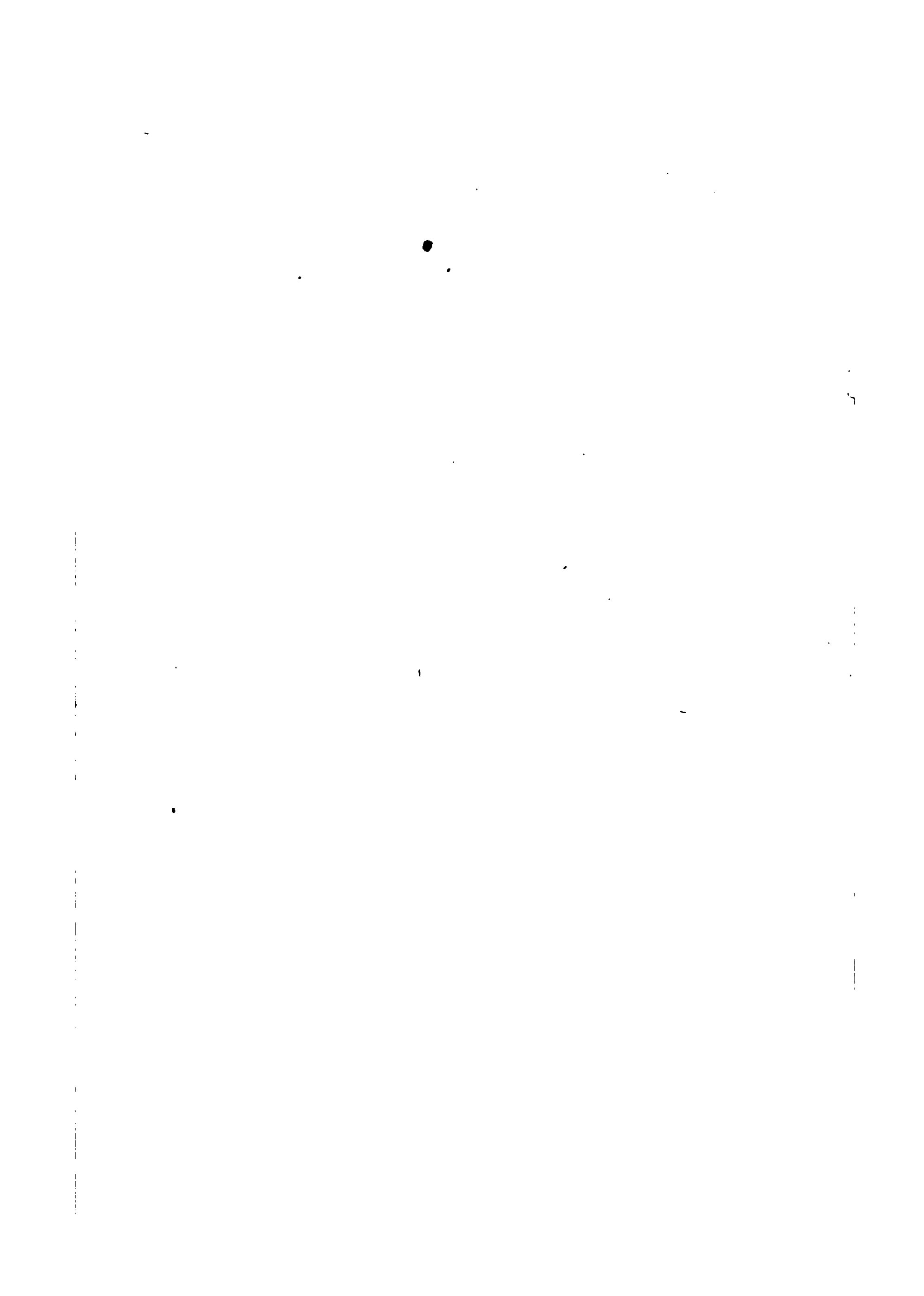
PREFACE

In introducing this work it is scarcely necessary to do more than specify one or two of the sources from which information has been gleaned. Such are the lectures of Paolo Emiliani-Giudici, which I have found interesting and instructive, though very discursive; and there is an exquisite little work (one of Hoepli's manuals) by Cesare Fenini, which gives an admirable *résumé* of the whole subject. Somewhat more practical is Raffaello Fornaciari's *Disegno storico della Letteratura italiana*. The generous help and kindly criticism of Mr. F. York Powell call also for grateful acknowledgement.

This Primer does not profess to present a complete account of Italian Literature, and it would be idle to expect unanimous approval of the names inserted or of those which have been left out. This is, however, only an elementary work, and it will be easy to supply inevitable deficiencies from more ambitious volumes. The book will have fulfilled its object, if it prove serviceable to those for whom it is primarily designed.

F. J. SNELL.

BAMPTON, N. DEVON:
April 29, 1893.



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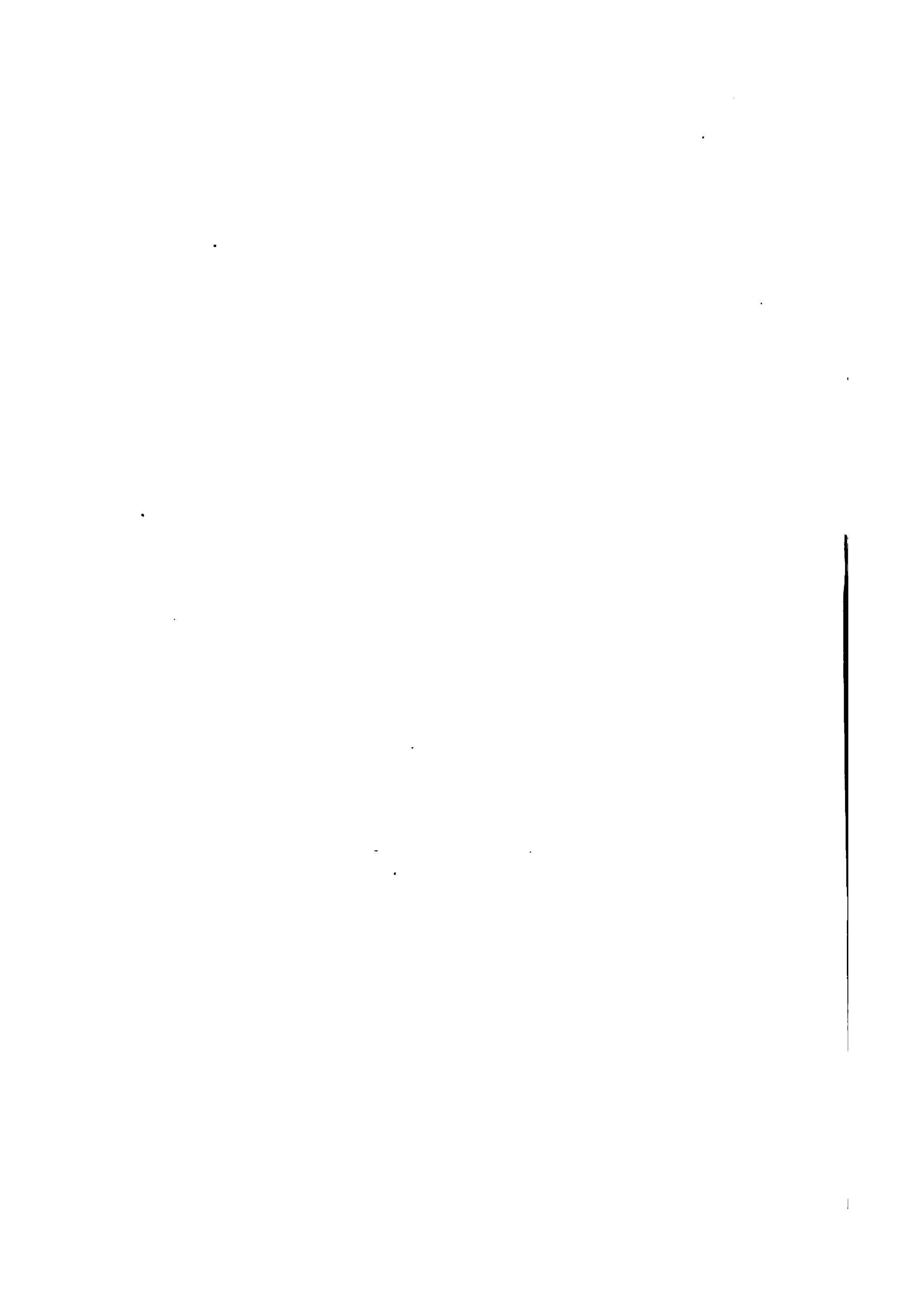
ITALIAN LITERATURE



CHAPTER I.

THE PRECURSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES OF DANTE.

AMONG Dante's manifold titles to honour, the highest and most distinctive is that of being the true founder of Italian literature. The words must not be misunderstood. They certainly do not imply that before Dante no one attempted Italian composition. To assert this would be to falsify history. It would involve also grave injustice to a number of writers whose example, no less than his own consciousness of power, animated Dante to those grand achievements which have rendered his name immortal. What the phrase *does* signify is that Dante, both in verse and prose, is the first of Italian authors to whom we can fitly apply the term 'master.' The efforts of his predecessors and coevals were all, more or less, tentative, and failed to lift their art wholly out of the region of experiment. They were groping after a perfection which was beyond their reach, beyond even their ken, but which was realised and revealed in the *Commedia*.

As Italy had been the home of the old civilisation, we might expect that she would be the first to rise, phoenix-like, from her ashes, and take her place as leader and guide of the literary movement which sprang up among the peoples of south-western Europe with the consolidation of the new states. If such is our expectation, we are deceived. In the

possession of a literature she was forestalled both by France and Spain, and when at length she does make her *début*, it is in the character of a humble follower of Provence. This anomaly may be explained partly by political conditions, which in Italy were less stable than in the sister countries—less propitious, therefore, to the cultivation of letters. But it should seem also that her post of privilege as *fille aînée* of the Empire was not in this regard beneficial to her. It had a retarding influence on her rejuvenation. For centuries the best Italian intellects were usurped by the effete and, for the mass of the people, unintelligible language of Rome. Literature was an affair of hieroglyphics. It was confined to a caste. The only recognised subjects were theology and jurisprudence. The remembrance of Roman greatness, of which the faint reflex was still visible in the papacy, was almost a fatal bar to Italian progress. It drew men's minds backwards and made them cling to impossible ideals. The restoration of the Empire, not the unity of Italy, was the dream of impassioned patriots, and in the millennium to which their hopes pointed the universal tongue was to be Latin. How disadvantageously this illusion would affect the status of the Italian vernacular, is obvious at a glance. It is a wonder that there was a native literature at all. Even the greatest minds succumbed to the snare, and by inditing epics in a dead language, poets prepared a sarcophagus for their reputations. We shall not be far wrong if we figure to ourselves the history of Italian literature, during its most significant epochs, as that of an internecine strife between the Latin and Italian languages, or, more broadly, between the past and the present.

The literature of Italy, properly so called, may be described, with some approach to accuracy, as an organic whole. It

had its beginnings somewhere in the thirteenth century in Sicily, but prior to this there was a burst of literary activity in the north of Italy, in the Marca Trivigiana. This circumstance is in some danger of being forgotten, and was not too notorious even in Dante's time. He at least reminds us that there *solea valore e cortesia trovarsi prima che Federigo avesse briga*. Apparently this poetry, imported from Provence, never quite divested itself of its foreign attributes, but it was not merely an exotic. It is seen at its best in the romantic verses, love-lyrics and moral poems, written for the people and sung by them in their native dialect. Fragments of these which are being gradually accumulated illustrate the importance of this attempt, which, however, did not ultimately succeed. The most flourishing period of this Franco-Italian verse dates from the close of the twelfth to the middle of the thirteenth century—in all about eighty years. Its professors were styled *trovatori*, a description which at once stamps them as imitators, though, having been adopted as the equivalent of 'poet,' it was freely applied to others. Peculiar interest attaches to one name—Sordello. Nothing is really known respecting him. The contradictory reports which have come down to us are too absurd to be believed, and what small kernel of truth there may be in them, it is impossible for even the wisest to extract. But Dante has helped the troubadour to a renown which he was impotent to achieve for himself; and that nothing might be wanting to him, Sordello has been made the subject of a great English poem by Mr. Browning.

It has been said that the cradle of Italian literature was Sicily. Still more extraordinary, its foster-father was a Teuton—Teuton, that is to say, in origin, for in all else, education, sympathies, aspirations, he was purely Italian.

Frederick II (1194–1250), son of Henry IV, and grandson of the terrible Barbarossa, lost both his parents in infancy. His mother Constance on dying committed him to the care of the Pope, Innocent III, who, singularly enough, showed but scant interest in his ward. The prince, therefore, as he grew up, imbibed sentiments which harmonized better with the traditions of his race than the relationship in which he actually stood to the head of the Church. As the result there was a complete breach between the two potentates, and one of the measures to which Frederick resorted in order to weaken his rival was an elaborate scheme for the secularisation of learning. Till then knowledge had been a monopoly of the clergy; Frederick, by enlarging one university and founding others, created a new order of lay scholars. With the same object he wrested poetry from the *giullari*, who had degraded it, and placed it in the more reverent hands of his *protégés*. This first epoch of Italian literature has been entitled, after the dynasty of which Frederick was the representative, *Suevic*. Frederick himself took an active part in regenerating poetry, and was copied by his sons Manfred and Enzo. Other votaries of the art were Piero delle Vigne, Jacopo da Lentini, often called the Notary, Guido and Odo dalle Colonne, Arrigo Testa and Mina, famous for her interchange of rhymes with Dante of Majano. Nor can we rightly omit Ciullo di Alcamo, whose dialogue between two lovers was long deemed to be the oldest specimen of Italian verse.

Necessarily this Sicilian poetry is somewhat rough-hewn. The peculiar circumstances under which it was produced have left their marks on it. Latinisms abound. There are turns and forms of speech, some of them dialectal, and others which appear to be borrowed from the French. The language is not always grammatical. But for all that

the poetry has its charm. It is like the utterances of childhood, fresh, graceful, and ingenuous, and its subject is love. Though so remote from what afterwards became the metropolis of Italian culture — Florence — it is not difficult to account for the early pre-eminence of Sicily in the sphere of letters. The effect of the Norman conquest was to throw open the island to French minstrelsy, and the influence of troubadour and *trouvère* on the native population would naturally be great in proportion to the close affinity between the languages of *oc*, *oïl*, and *si*. One proof of this pre-eminence is that the term 'Sicilian' was for a while a synonyme for standard or polite Italian, and Dante conjectured that it would be perpetuated in this sense. His prediction turned out false, but at this we need feel no surprise. It was frustrated partly by his own genius, partly by a succession of calamities which rendered Sicily no longer possible as a centre of poetical studies.

From Sicily the contagion spread to the mainland, but without any striking change in the symptoms. A sonnet written in Tuscany at this time is of much the same character as a canzonet of Palermo, and regarding their attainments, the writers are very much on a level. Thus any verdict which we might pass on Guido dalle Colonne would serve with slight modifications for Folcacchiero of Siena, Onesto and Fabrizio of Bologna, Saladino of Pavia, Giraldo of Castello, Noffo of Oltrarno, or Dante of Majano. In all of them it is impossible not to recognise tokens of the courtly and artificial muse of Provence.

The first in whom the fruits of Frederick's policy are clearly perceptible is **Guido Guinicelli**. Guinicelli († 1276) was the founder of what has been termed the Bolognese school of poetry, which differed from troubadour rhyme in

being more learned. What Guinicelli did was this: he took poetry and wedded it to Platonic philosophy. He harped on the metaphysics of love, analyzing and examining it in order to discover its latent properties. In him poetry became objective. It dealt with love no longer as an inward experience, but as an external phenomenon. At first this will hardly commend itself as an improvement. Indeed, such a mode of treating the grand passion was, in an important sense, retrograde, violating as it did one of the chief canons of real poetry which ought, before all, to express feeling.

Looking at the matter as we naturally do from this standpoint, we of to-day find some difficulty in assenting to the high praise bestowed on Guinicelli by his contemporaries: for instance, Buonagiunta of Lucca. Buonagiunta, it is true, is not altogether insensible to Guinicelli's defects. He calls him subtle, and rails at his obscurity, but in the very sonnet in which he gives vent to his discontent with him, the Lucchese allows that he 'surpasses every other troubadour.' Even Dante recognised his authority, deigned to borrow from him, and as if this were not enough, called him 'father' and 'best of those who ever used soft and lovely rhymes of love.' For us Guinicelli's service to literature consists in this, that he broke the spell of tradition and gave to poetry a body, an element of permanence. If Guinicelli, in that he still clave to love as his theme, did not effect his full emancipation, others might transcend this limitation. The significant fact remains that henceforward poetry was no longer necessarily of a personal nature. It is a matter for regret therefore that Guinicelli, the inaugurator of the change, was so clearly deficient in imagination and force, and thereby disqualified for giving a better direction to his innovating tendencies. Other alterations, but of minor importance, may be noted in

writings of the Bolognese school. There are fewer suggestions of dialect, and it was at this period that a transition was made from Provençal rhythms to the movement of the Italian stanza. But owing to the fondness of these poets for scholastic discussion, they did not attain, or even approach, their high ideal in the reconcilement of science with art.

As regards Guinicelli's personal history we possess only the scantiest information. He was born at Bologna of a family whose style was *principe*, and he was a Ghibelline, a partisan, that is to say, of the emperor in his opposition to the pope. On the defeat of the Lambertazzi faction in 1274, he was driven into exile, but what afterwards became of him or where he died, we do not know.

The next poet of distinction is Guido Cavalcanti, a Florentine. Most writers on the subject have made of this latter circumstance a pretext for a digression on Florence, on the remarkable part which was taken by her in the development of Italian culture. Attempts have been made to explain this, now by the charming position of the city on the banks of the Arno and its girdle of pleasant hills, now by its soft climate, sometimes by the native shrewdness and energy of the Florentines which caused one of the popes to describe them as the fifth element in the universe. In considerations of this order the effects of climate and situation cannot be entirely overlooked, though Nature under all her aspects has been found a fruitful source of inspiration. So too with intellectual conditions, talent,—'an appetite, a feeling, and a love'—is a necessary postulate for success in literature. But it is a question whether any of these, or all these accidents together, afford a complete solution of the problem. Some regard must certainly be paid to history, and it is worthy of observation that in Tuscany the invasions of the

barbarians were few and transient. In later times Florence clung tenaciously to her institutions—showed herself a steadfast champion of freedom. In this respect she was always a generation behind the rest of Italy, yielding at last to the tide of political degeneracy, but only after a gallant attempt to maintain her liberties. Apart from Florence, her republican forms and the fervour of her patriotism, Dante at least would be inconceivable.

Guido Cavalcanti († 1300), like the other Guido, was a Ghibelline, and adopted also, in some measure, Guinicelli's notions of verse. He belonged to a rich and noble Florentine family, and in his case a taste for study was hereditary. He enjoyed the friendship of Dante, who, however, with his usual impartiality places Cavalcanti's father, as a disciple of Epicurus, in hell.

Cavalcanti's poetry is of a twofold character. He possessed a genuine poetic temperament, but this did not save him from being attracted, either by a misguided ambition or the force of precedent, towards the dull pedantries of Bologna. It was not, however, a complete surrender. Not all his poems smack of metaphysics, and if some of his verses composed in imitation of Guinicelli's are coldly scientific, those in which he abandons himself to the promptings of his own genius, are radiant with fancy and throb with life. Many of his sonnets, all the ballads which remain to us, fall to this second category. The lines which he addressed to his Mandetta, a lady of whom he was enamoured in a pilgrimage to Saint James of Galicia, are deliciously tender; and the pathos of the sonnet on his exile is anything but adscititious, being inspired by real suffering. The poem, however, for which Cavalcanti was chiefly famous in his day, is his canzonet on the Nature of Love. It produced an immense

sensation, and the most learned philosophers, from Egidio Colonna, tutor of Philip le Bel, downwards, found an agreeable occupation in attempting to expound it.

Cavalcanti, who is described as a great spirit, mingled in the civil commotions which so fatally distracted his native city, and was banished in the year of Dante's priorate to Sarzana. His place of exile proved unwholesome, and he was allowed to return. He died at the end of August in the same year 1300.

In **Cino Sinibaldi** (1270–1336), generally called from his birthplace 'da Pistoia,' we encounter a somewhat different personage. Although the contemporary of Dante, whom he survived, intellectually he belongs to the preceding age. He was not influenced by the great art of Dante, and his affinities are rather with the Sicilian school than with that of Bologna. Poet not of reflexion, but of sentiment, Cino, least of all his coevals, syllogizes in verse. This is scarcely as we should have expected, since he was deeply versed in law. The simplicity of his poetry, however, may have been the fruit of a reaction from severe and possibly distasteful studies. His verse is Platonic in tone, but whatever philosophy it contains is innocent of formalism. Unequivocally Cino renounced theory. When one day Cavalcanti taunted him with plagiarism, Sinibaldi replied in a very sarcastic vein, protesting that Guido had never written anything worth the stealing. As for himself, he says, it is evident that he never was an artist. He is a man *di basso ingegno*, weeping for a heart that is gone from this world. Cino, holding exclusively to the old forms of love-poetry, arrived at such perfection in them that he is hardly surpassed even by Petrarch. He too was an ardent Ghibelline.

Mention must be made in the next place of Dante's tutor,

Brunetto Latino († 1294) and his *Tesoretto.* Of the various sorts of mediaeval composition, the vision had been among the most popular. It was this tradition which Latino seized upon, and to which he gave new vogue in the *Tesoretto.* He had been despatched by the Republic of Florence to Alfonso, King of Castile. Whilst he was returning a scholar met him, from Bologna, and informed him of the expulsion of the Guelfs, or papal party. Brunetto who, unlike other poets, favoured their cause, was so overcome with grief that he lost his way. In seeking to regain it, he found himself—he feigns —on the slope of a mountain, and, standing before him, an ancient and majestic dame whom he recognises as Nature. Hereupon a long scientific discourse ensues betwixt her and Latino. The poem has a few other incidents which, however, we need not stay to particularize.

The *Tesoretto,* though it is termed a poem, is such only to the eye. It is written in septenarian couplets—naturally a dull metre—which, not being skilfully managed, are monotonous in the extreme. In it, the *Tesoretto,* are no lively images or suggestive metaphors, and it may be characterized not unfairly as a mould, into which Latino, an industrious and vain clerk, emptied his superfluous lore. It has its prose counterpart in the *Tesoro,* an encyclopaedic work which Latino composed in French, and which was translated into Italian by Bono Giamboni. It owed its reputation to the fact that it was written in one of the vernacular languages which the generality of scholars despised, and for centuries it was held in the highest esteem. The *Tesoretto,* on the contrary, was short-lived. Only when enquiries came to be made as to the probable sources of the *Commedia* was much interest taken in it. It would doubtless be easy to exaggerate the influence which Latino may be assumed to have

exercised over his more famous disciple—many critics have done so. Considering, however, the early and intimate relations between them, and that Dante is certain to have known the *Tesoretto*, nothing is more likely than that Latino's example may have gone some way in determining the form of the *Commedia*. Of course, in Dante's hands the vision becomes a totally new thing.

A niche must here be found for **Fra Jacopone da Todi**, described by Villemain as *le bouffon du genre dont le Dante était le poète*. He was an inspired madman, who, having lost the wife of his youth, became a Franciscan. What he composed in his frenzy is so eccentric that it is difficult to give it a name. It is pure midsummer madness, the like of which is nowhere in literature to be found. Like other unfortunates, he had his lucid intervals, but what he wrote then, though more decorous, is also more feeble. He was the author of the *Stabat Mater*, a tearful Latin poem, which has done far more for his fame than any of his Italian ravings. The date of his birth is unknown, but he died at a great age in 1306. His real name was Jacopo, which was turned by the people into Jacopone on account of his buffooneries. His surname was Benedetti.

The catalogue of Dante's rivals ends with another Guido, or, as he is called more frequently, **Guittone d' Arezzo** († 1294). His general style, disfigured by intentional obscurity and foolish artifice, is the reverse of attractive. Through a long invertebrate paragraph, and at distressingly short intervals, he will ring the changes on a single vocable, under its several forms as verb and noun, adverb and adjective, so that it is sore work to read him, and this is only one of his trickeries. His writings, however, are important as affording the earliest specimens of Italian epistolary com-

position. He has left forty letters, thirty-two in prose and eight in verse. On purpose, as it might seem, to confound our natural expectations, there are given to him certain sonnets which are all that his other writings are not, graceful and pure, the acme of good taste and felicitous expression. Hence in the opinion of divers critics, more attentive to the logic of the case than concerned for Guittone's reputation, they must be judged away from him; the more so, because he is several times spoken of in no gentle terms by Dante. A question, however, might arise as to the importance of Dante's censure. It would not be difficult to adduce proofs that the greatest poets are not always the best critics. To select one of the most apposite, there is a passage in the *Commedia* in which Dante passionately defends Arnold Daniel from the depreciatory comparisons of Guittone, but later judges are unanimous that Guittone was right.

So much for the poets. A brief reference must be made also to the prose-writers. One of the most striking features of chivalry is the enthusiasm which was everywhere shown for chronicles. The earliest specimen of the sort now extant in Italian is a work by **Matteo Spinelli.** It is written in the Apulian dialect, and for that reason it is usual to forbear any detailed notice of it. It will be convenient to mention here the *Novellino* or Flower of Gentle Speech, although it is not quite a parallel case, being a collection of a hundred tales. While the compilation, in the form in which we have received it, is undoubtedly later than the thirteenth century, there are individual stories dating from the reign of Frederick II, which are here permanently embalmed.

The first author of any considerable work was **Ricordano Malespini,** who wrote a history of Florence. This chronicle, like others of its class subsequently, has a long preamble in

the nature of a universal history, and reaching back to Ninus. The insertion was not wholly gratuitous. The age was one of gross ignorance, which Malespini, somewhat out of season, thus attempted to dispel. Ricordano Malespini's chronicle ends with the year 1282, and is continued by his nephew **Giacchetto** down to 1286. The work supplies no internal evidence of the break, the nephew being in manner so like the uncle that the *Storia* might well pass as the composition of one and the same person. Another historian of the period is **Dino Compagni** († 1255–1324), who takes up his parable at the point where Giacchetto Malespini leaves off. He recounts the famous reform of Giano della Bella, the coming of Charles of Valois, the usurpation and death of Carlo Donati, and the descent of Henry of Luxemburg. Dino was not only eye-witness, but was himself *pars magna* of the scenes he realistically depicts. Singularly, as appears to us, he makes but little of Dante, although the latter had preceded him in the office of prior. Political differences may in part account for this, but men had hardly had time as yet to take in the superhuman dimensions of Dante's character and genius. Finally, the reader should be warned that some scepticism exists as to the authenticity of these chronicles.

This was a great age of translators. Brunetto Latino, who was called on that account by Filippo Villani the 'Schoolmaster of the Florentines,' rendered into Italian Cicero's Books on Rhetoric, together with other writings of the ancients, and Bono Giamboni, as before noted, did the same for the larger work of Latino.

CHAPTER II.

DANTE.

It was intimated at the outset that **Dante** (1265–1321) was the virtual creator of Italian literature, and that writers who went before prepared the way for him. We are now better able to see in what sense this was true. In the Sicilian school there was passion without knowledge, in the Bolognese knowledge without passion. (The formula need not be construed too literally: it represents correctly enough the broad aspects of the case.) There can, however, be no great work of imagination in which these elements do not blend, to which heart and head do not contribute equally. This auspicious union was consummated in Dante. Setting aside the question of the truth or falsehood of those systems in which he had been educated, and looking only to the amount of information which he actually assimilated, it may be said that, with one or two exceptions, none ever knew more than Dante. It is certain that none ever felt more deeply. The result might almost have been foreseen. Poetry, which had before existed in a gaseous state, was by Dante crystallized into the consistency, splendour, and worth of a diamond.

His biography, for so great a man, is very brief. Carlyle says it is 'irrecoverably lost,' but enough has been saved for the interpretation of his writings. A Florentine, and born in the city the 8th May 1265, he came of an old and honourable family, the Aldighieri. One of his ancestors, Cacciaguida,

fought under the Emperor Conrad in the Crusades, and after being dubbed a knight fell gloriously in the Holy Land. His father dying when the poet was still an infant, the task of bringing him up devolved on his mother, Bella. It was excellently performed. Brunetto Latino is said to have been his preceptor, and to have taught him rhetoric, while instruction in other subjects was imparted to him in the schools of his native city. In 1281, when he was hardly sixteen, he proceeded (so, at least, says Benvenuto da Imola) to Bologna to perfect himself.

Dante was a lover of the fine arts, and an intimate friend of Giotto, as well as of Oderigi or Oderisi da Gubbio, a notable miniature painter of Bologna. Furthermore, we learn from Boccaccio that Dante, being naturally sombre, sought relief from his thoughts in the society of the celebrated singers and musicians at Florence, and especially of one Casella, who appears to have set Dante's verse to music. His attachment to these aesthetic pursuits, however, was not such as to render him less expert in more virile accomplishments. He fought on horseback in the front ranks at Campaldino (1289) against the Ghibellines of Arezzo, and the following year shared the triumph of his countrymen over the Pisans at Caprona. In due time he was advanced to be one of the chief magistrates of Florence, in which position it was inevitable that he should be drawn into the violent and bitter struggles which disfigured her public life. The rival parties were the Neri and Bianchi. In the former the Guelfs predominated, while the latter included many Ghibellines. Dante in his office of prior was thought to favour the Bianchi. During the progress of the quarrel he went to Rome to implore the mediation of the pope, and his enemies availed themselves of his absence to obtain

sentence of exile against him, with the confiscation of his goods. This stern decree was afterwards aggravated by the brutal corollary that he should be burnt, if captured, alive. The pretext assigned was that he had been guilty of peculation.

The date of Dante's priorate was 1300, and he was banished in 1302. In 1304 he probably took part in a sudden attack on the city by his fellow-exiles. The assault failed, and it does not appear that it was ever renewed. From this time Dante's hopes of restoration depended not so much on the efforts of the Bianchi as on the general success of the Ghibelline cause, to which, on other and higher grounds, he attached supreme importance. He now led a nomadic life, partly at the various seats of learning, partly at the courts of princelings, like Can Grande of Verona. He died the 14th of September, 1321, at Ravenna, where he lies buried in the Friars' Church. Previous to his exile he married a lady named Gemma Donati, by whom he had sons and daughters. Two sons, Pietro and Jacopo, annotated their father's poem. Neither rose above mediocrity. The gossips would have it that Dante's wife Gemma was a scold, and that, having once parted from her, he never wished for her again. Boccaccio has reported this scandal, with a qualifying *non so*. However that may be, certain it is that Dante was always in verse or prose reviving the memory of his first love. To this first love of Dante, so fruitful in its consequences, the reader must now direct his attention.

When Dante was nine years old, he was invited to a party at the house of one of the noblest citizens of Florence, Folco Portinari, where he made the acquaintance of an angelic little being, named Bice or Beatrice. She was the daughter

of Portinari, and about a year younger than Dante. It was springtime, and the sweet season adding its influence to the festiveness of the scene and Bice's childish beauty, there was wrought in Dante's heart a mysterious change which left him no more master of himself. His passion had not much to feed on, but Dante was not dissatisfied. A sight, a greeting, sent him to the seventh heaven. No terms were too extravagant to describe his emotions, for they absorbed his whole nature, and out of the abundance of his charity he was ready to forgive his worst enemies their transgressions. What, however, is of more concern to us is the force of this attachment in developing his poetic faculty. At nineteen years of age, as he himself tells us, he wrote his first sonnet, addressing it to all the poets then living in order to provoke a reply. Among the answers he received was one from his namesake, Dante of Majano. The little poem, whose subject was a love-dream, was published anonymously, and counted among its admirers Guido Cavalcanti, who became, as the fatal consequence, one of Dante's warmest friends.

By-and-bye Beatrice was married to a young nobleman, Simone de' Bardi, but the event does not appear to have occasioned in Dante any excessive perturbation of spirit. His love for her had always been platonic: at any rate he survived. What *did* prostrate him was her death, which occurred the 9th of June, 1290, when Dante was twenty-five. From that time the gaiety of his spirits was permanently eclipsed. For years he was inconsolable. He could not forget his loss. Even study, the counsels of grave philosophers, failed to restore his equilibrium. In vain he read Boethius and Cicero. He could find vent for his feelings nowhere—except in verse. Towards his twenty-ninth year he grouped his scattered poems into an opuscule,

which he entitled *Vita Nuova*, and sent it with a sonnet to Brunetto Latini.

The *Vita Nuova* is not simply verse. It is verse in a setting of prose, and was intended as a memorial to the dead Beatrice. In it he relates the commencement, progress, and conclusion of their loves. The work is quasi-scientific, Dante being at once poet and commentator. Guided by the same motives which prompted Goethe to compile that surprising document *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, though employing a different method, Dante takes each poem and expounds its meaning. Already in this his first work he certifies himself as a dreamer. The *Vita Nuova* is a train of soft illusions, or, to change the figure, we have here the pilgrim of love recounting his ecstasies. It closes with the mention of a wondrous vision surpassing all which had before appeared to him, and the lover and clairvoyant expresses the not futile hope that he may say of Beatrice that which was never yet said of any. In these rather enigmatical terms some have read an announcement of the *Divine Comedy*—a reading which, apart from the plain coincidence, receives support from the tradition that of the *Inferno* eight cantos were completed before Dante's exile.

The poetry of the *Vita Nuova* has a delicate undefinable charm which springs largely from its spontaneity. The images, as they arose in his mind, clothed themselves in appropriate language which Dante had no need to retouch. As regards the commentary it is notable as being the first prose writing in Italian literature which reveals the hand of an artist. It has indeed some smack of the scholastic rigour of the age, but whatever its deficiencies in this respect, the vocabulary is richer, the style more majestic, the expressions bolder than anything to be found in the works of his prede-

cessors. The publication of the *Vita Nuova*, added to his rhymes on various subjects which were passed from hand to hand, rendered Dante the most famous poet of the time, and among those who saluted the rising luminary was the illustrious King of Hungary, Charles Martel.

Dante's next great work was the *Convito*, written seemingly in the interval between the separation of the exiles and the election of Henry of Luxemburg as King of the Romans. The title is borrowed from the *Symposium* of Plato, and Dante's object in writing the book was to reproach his countrymen for their conduct towards him, to show what manner of man they had lost by banishing him, and, if possible, to effect his return. The work is similar in design to the *Vita Nuova*. It was to consist of fourteen canzonets in honour of Beatrice, from which he undertook to bring out the philosophic import concealed under the obvious sense. This he did in a scientific comment, which, however, does not extend beyond the third canzonet. These poems were certainly not written with any *arrière pensée* such as Dante imputes to them, but the spirit of allegory was abroad, and this, assisted by the precedent of Cavalcanti's poem on the Nature of Love and the innumerable commentaries thereupon, fortified Dante for an otherwise impossible task, i.e. that of extracting from a piece something which it does not contain.

The *Convito* is the first successful attempt to trick out Aristotelian philosophy in an Italian dress. Emphasis is to be laid on the word 'successful,' for leaving out Bono Giamboni's translation of Latini's *Tesoro*, which was more rhetorical than scientific, a celebrated physician, Taddeo Ippocratista, had attempted a translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, but the result was a failure. The *Convito* opens with a

glowing eulogy on the Italian vernacular, which Dante likens to a new sun destined to arise and give light to those who are in gloom and darkness through the wonted sun, which does not illumine *them*. Allowance being made for the nature of the theme, the style of the *Convito* is in a high degree lofty and grand. Dante, whilst he adheres to scientific convention, is skilled in inventing new phrases which shed interest on a subject essentially dry, and here and there are outbursts of feeling, lyrical digressions, in which, released from the trammels of the schools, he allows full scope to his splendid eloquence. We must not, however, look for much originality in the thought of the *Convito*. In those days Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology were so inextricably bound up with each other as to be, in a certain sense, one, and Dante was rigidly orthodox. In this respect the *Convito* is mainly of service as a commentary on the *Commedia*, in parts of which, especially the *Paradiso*, the same ideas are reproduced, only more briefly.

If the *Convito* teaches us Dante's philosophy, *De Monarchia*, a Latin tractate, shows us his politics. In order to counteract the intrigues of the Pope, Philip of France, and the King of Naples, who sought to undermine his authority, Henry VII, in 1309, made a descent upon Italy, thereby raising the hopes of the Ghibellines to their zenith. Unluckily at the very moment when he was preparing to take vigorous and decisive action, the emperor sickened and died at the monastery of Buonconvento. This deplorable event both ruined the fortunes of the Ghibelline party and rendered Dante's exile perpetual. In his elation at the prospects which Henry's advent unfolded to him, Dante wrote several letters in which he boldly assailed his adversaries and proclaimed their destruction with an acrimony which his biographers have

striven to excuse on the ground of human infirmity. Certainly it would not be difficult to apologise for a man who was at that very time under sentence of being burned alive, but Dante's resentment was rather political than personal. He did not desire the extinction of Florence, but his own return thither and the organization of the city on (as he conceived) sound political principles. What those principles were he gives us to understand in *De Monarchia.*

Dante's theory is that ideal government is one, comprehending all nations. Oligarchies and democracies are departures from the true type—'accidental governments,' 'oblique polities'—as is proved by their involving wars and dissensions. What is required is not division, but unity. On turning over the pages of history, he finds his ideal realised in the Roman Empire, whose existence he regards as having been in a special manner ordained by Providence. The Roman Empire is the empire *par excellence*, and its restoration is devoutly to be wished. These ideas are not by any means the exclusive property of Dante. There is hardly a political treatise of that age in which they may not be found. They are discussed, above all, in St. Thomas Aquinas' *De Regimine Principum.* The difficulty lay in their application. 'Who was the rightful successor of Augustus?' — that was the question. The Ghibellines replied, 'The Emperor of Germany': the Guelfs, 'The Pope.' Whilst, then, Henry of Luxemburg sought to enforce his prerogative by material means, Dante undertook a crusade for the same object among the learned. His treatise is in the form of an immense syllogism. He shows in the first book that the perfection of civil life is a universal monarchy; in the second, that this perfection is incarnate in the Roman Empire, which is, so to speak, in abeyance, not repealed or done away;

whilst in the third he defines the relations between the empire and the papacy, and maintains that loyalty to the one does not imply disrespect to the other. He asserts that Italy, as the centre of the Roman Empire, ought to be one, but rejects the conclusion that municipal privileges, so dear to his republican countrymen, should be forfeited to the emperor.

The treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* deals at large with a subject to which Dante had already referred in the *Convito*—the Italian language. Although utterly distinct from *De Monarchia* as regards its contents, it proceeds from the same intention, i. e. to pave the way for national unity. As in the case of *De Monarchia* also he writes for the learned, and what he essays to prove is that there are latent capacities in the Italian vernacular which would enable it to surpass its sister-dialects, and even to vie with the Latin from which it had sprung. Such a proposition at the time could only pass as rank heresy, as in the highest degree presumptuous. The way Dante sets about his task is this:—he begins by investigating the origin of language. He next defines vernacular and grammatical speech. By the former he understands living languages in general, and by the latter dead languages, more especially Latin and Greek. From the concord of primitive speech he passes to the story of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues, describes the spread of various languages, and having arrived at the south of Europe, distinguishes the derived languages as those of *oc*, *oïl*, and *si*, pausing on the last as the actual speech of the Italian people. He examines the nature and condition of the different dialects, and successively rejects them all, finding in them discrepancies from those models of Italian composition which had been circulating since the reign of Frederick II. Finally, he concludes that 'illustrious car-

dinal, aulic' vernacular appears in all cities, but resides in none.

We now come to the greatest poem ever produced in Italy, and, we may surely add, in Christendom. All that has been described hitherto, all the poetry and prose of Dante's precursors, and his own, derive a great part of their significance from the bearing which they have on the *Commedia.* The *Commedia* itself is a retrospect, a summary — the totality of the middle ages. And it is Dante in his maturity and perfection. Whatever he at any time thought, felt, hoped, is here presented in its most artistic form. It is a splendid and culminating effort, in which the various threads of melody echoing in his heart and registered in his life are wrought up in a glorious climax. The scheme of the *Commedia* is somewhat as follows:—The poet first imagines himself in a dark wood at the foot of a mountain. Here he is confronted by three wild beasts, a leopard, a lion, and a wolf, which appear to him one after the other and arrest his further progress. Then the shade of Virgil presents itself and promises to show him the way out of the forest. He tells Dante that it was the express will of Heaven that he, like Aeneas, founder of the holy Roman Empire, and Saint Paul, the chief bulwark of Christianity, should visit the eternal regions. After a while, as they approach the difficult pass, Dante falters and entreats his conductor for some proof of his sufficiency. Virgil thereupon details to him how that three heavenly ladies, discerning his piteous case, had interested themselves in his deliverance. One he does not name, another he calls Lucia, and the third Beatrice. The pilgrim is reassured, and with this the poem is fairly launched.

Under Virgil's guidance Dante visits the circles and dun-

geons of the damned, first passing Limbo with its amiable habitants of virtuous heathen and unchristened babes. He is the terrified spectator of those dreadful torments which are the familiar routine of hell. It may perhaps be noticed that many of the penal divisions have a coryphaeus or hero in some historic or legendary personage of note. Thus Plutus is lord of the covetous, Phlegyas of the wrathful, Minotaur of the violent, Geryon of the fraudulent, and Cacus of the robbers. The circles diminish on the pattern of a Greek fret, and the whole terminates in the gigantic person of Lucifer. At this point the travellers perform a summersault, and after more journeying arrive at the Antipodes. Here the sight of an exceeding high mountain greets them, like a sort of Jacob's ladder, connecting this world, which Dante conceives to be the centre of the universe, with the planets. This is the Mount of Purgatory, which is marked by various degrees, and at the top is the Earthly Paradise. The sufferings of Purgatory differ from those of Hell, not so much in their nature as in their duration and purpose. On arriving at the Earthly Paradise Dante passes out of the tutelage of Virgil into that of Beatrice, whose advent is signalized by triumphal pageantries. Beatrice is now a glorified saint, but she still manifests a pure memory of her ancient love by her habit of living flame. Then Dante, voyaging from glory to glory, visits the planets and fixed stars, each with its company of happy spirits, and is at length conducted to the presence of the Good Itself. The smile on Beatrice's face, which has been still growing in sweetness and in intensity, culminates, and Dante's vision is no more.

Such, in the barest outline, is the sublimest poem of Christendom. What is its interpretation? That the wood,

the hill, the lion, the leopard, the greyhound, Virgil, Dante himself, Beatrice, Lucia, and the Lady Merciful are allegorical, it is impossible to doubt, and one explanation of them is this:—Dante, perceiving that he has lost his way in the forest of vice, attempts to raise himself to the heights of virtue, but luxury, pride, avarice, symbolized by the leopard, the lion, and the wolf, hinder him from doing so. Moral philosophy, typified by Virgil, shows him the consequences of vice in the eternal punishment of the damned and the temporal punishment of the souls in purgatory, whilst theology, in the person of Beatrice, leads him to the sight of virtue as rewarded in the blessedness of the saints. Dante is thus induced to amend his life and return to the straight path. This is substantially Dante's own account of the *Commedia*, to which he assigns a double meaning, somewhat as Spenser does to his *Faerie Queene*. In the letter to Can Grande della Scala he writes, 'It is to be remarked that the sense of this work is not simple, but on the contrary I may say manifold. For one sense is that which is derived from the letter, and another is that which is derived from the things signified by the letter. The first is called literal, the second is allegorical or moral. The subject then of the whole work taken literally is the condition of the souls after death simply considered. For on this and around this the whole action of the work turns. But if the work be taken allegorically, the subject is man, how by actions of merit or demerit he justly deserves reward or punishment.'

Some, investing these symbols with a political meaning, look upon the poem as a perpetual allusion to the vicissitudes of the author. Such a view, however, is hardly tenable. The political element is certainly not wanting, but the moral, the religious element is strongly in the ascendant. There

is room perhaps for a compromise. Dante is a type of humanity redeemed by the blood of Christ. He is at the same time the symbol of Italian humanity which has gone astray from the straight path, has forsaken imperialism for democracy. Democracy is represented by the leopard, a creature as lithe and beautiful outwardly as it is cruel and merciless within. By the lion is meant the House of France, whose escutcheon bore that device, and the wolf is the church, whose ministers in too many instances were veritable wolves in sheep's clothing. Interpreting the poem thus, the aim of the *Commedia* is the reformation of manners in the world at large, and especially in the Italian peninsula.

The chief feature in the style of the *Commedia* is its objectivity. What Dante wishes to say is expressed in the fewest possible terms, but his pictures are complete and incessant. He insists on making a minute inventory of his vast cosmorama—a mode of treatment which a writer of less imagination would have found too exacting for a composition of such length, or which, in other hands, might have resulted in the specification of loose and irrelevant details. With Dante, on the contrary, nothing is irrelevant; his whole poem is charged with meaning. This fulness of significance has been a considerable tax on the ingenuity of his commentators, who, ere now, have arrived at the most opposite conclusions as to the purport of his emblems; and owing to this incapacity to understand him, charges of obscurity have been launched at Dante. Such accusations are by no means idle, Dante's brevity and concentration of phrase having their natural sequel in the perplexity and fatigue of his readers.

The greatness of the *Commedia*, its almost superhuman greatness, was at once recognised in Italy, where it was

received as a kind of national Bible, and professors—Boccaccio being the first—were appointed to interpret it. With scarcely an objector of importance, apart from Voltaire, who was also a disparager of Shakespeare, its reputation has remained constant, and nothing, we may be sure, but a universal cataclysm will extinguish it.

Something should be said about the title. Dante named his poem the *Commedia*, and he has told us why—because after many adventures it ends happily. The adulation of later times, the feeling that this name *Commedia* was all too mean for a poem of such rare excellence, prefixed to it the epithet *divina*, and thus it has ever since been known as the Divine Comedy.

The intrinsic worth of the *Commedia*, as well as the universal *éclat* with which it was received, were such as to discourage imitators, and the one or two attempts made to rival it only served to show the nature of Dante's incomparable triumph in still higher relief. Of Petrarch's ill-advised challenge it will be opportune to speak in the next chapter, but it may not be amiss here briefly to refer to two works, both in *terza rima*, and obviously inspired by the *Commedia*. The first is the *Dittamondo*, or as it is entitled in the older editions, *Dicta Mundi* of **Fazio degli Uberti**, grandson of the famous, or rather infamous, Farinata. It is an amalgam of history and geography, and performs for this world the office which the *Commedia* had performed for the next. It is not altogether without merit, Fazio being one of the most cultivated men of the age, but its recommendations are merely of the verbal sort. Except in those places where the author endeavours to be Dantesque, the style is remarkably neat and clear. The other work is the *Quadriregio* of **Federigo Frezzi da Foligni**, which deals with all four partitions of the

universe, but, as compared with Dante's, Frezzi's point of view is more that of a pagan. The *Quadriregio,* though not a great poem, is distinguished by occasional passages of much force, and the versification is nearly always elegant. The date of these writings is not exactly known, but both appertain to the fourteenth century.

CHAPTER III.

PETRARCH AND BOCCACCIO.

THOUGH Petrarch and Boccaccio belong to the generation succeeding that of Dante, it is customary to class them together under the name *triumvirate.* The title is chosen somewhat unhappily, but the description has taken root, and apart from its associations, is certainly not without some basis in reason. Dante, the creator of Italian literature, Petrarch, its greatest lyrical writer, and Boccaccio, the father of Italian prose, stand out from among the minor writers of the age like Titans, and on the ground of merit are sufficiently related *inter se* to allow of their being placed in a single category. But this classification has no validity outside the peninsula. Dante is a first-rate genius; he takes rank with Shakespeare and Homer, literary demigods, whereas Petrarch and Boccaccio, at their greatest, are perfectly human, perfectly conceivable. Petrarch and Boccaccio are noble artists; Dante is profoundly original. Whether Boccaccio is to be preferred to Petrarch, or contrariwise, Petrarch to Boccaccio, it might excite a controversy to offer to determine. As a poet at least, in spite of his inordinate ambition, Boccaccio must be content with the third place, the rôle of Lepidus, in the triumvirate.

Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) was the son of a notary, called Petracco, who was banished from Florence

with many more famous and eminent than himself, by Charles of Valois. He and his wife, Eletta Canigiana, betook themselves to Arezzo, where, about two years later, Francesco was born; and ultimately they went to reside at Avignon, in the south of France. Here Petrarch grew up, and, a fact to which he probably owed much, he had as his tutor a Tuscan scholar. The circumstances of the family were not good, and Petrarch was sent by his father to the schools of Montpellier and Bologna to study jurisprudence. For a youth of Petrarch's temperament this was not a congenial occupation, and he seems to have spent much of his time in surreptitious reading of the classics. His father discovered his propensity, and with a view to stopping the practice, surprised him and threw his books into the fire. But strict as he was, he relented at the sight of his son's consternation, and drawing two manuscripts, a Cicero and a Virgil, half burnt from the flames, replaced them in Petrarch's hands, while Petrarch, in an ecstasy of gratitude, promised that his sole care henceforth should be law.

Not long after his parents died, a deplorable event, but not without its compensations, since for Petrarch the avenue was thus opened to fame and fortune. He became attached to the household of the powerful Colonnesi, by whom he was treated with the utmost affection and esteem, and he now definitely forsook jurisprudence for literature. At the age of twenty-two he happened to be in a church at Avignon, where he saw a beautiful girl, and instantly fell in love with her. Her name was Laura, she was then twenty years old, and she had been wedded two years before to Hugh de Sade, scion of a distinguished family of Avignon. The discovery of this fact made no difference in the warmth of Petrarch's affections. Avignon was the hotbed of troubadour

traditions, whereby marriage with another was no bar to love. It was understood of course that the love was to be simply and strictly platonic, and such, it appears, was Petrarch's. Notwithstanding, he seems never to have been free from scruples on the subject, and if in his casuistical dialogues with Saint Augustine he talks of a moral improvement as the fruit of his passion, in his Letter to Posterity he thinks repentance a more becoming posture. It is quite gratuitous, however, to assail the character of Laura, who accepted the homage of the poet, but on his own testimony repelled the advances of the man.

Petrarch's fame now rests on his *Canzoniere* or lyrical poems, which describe the phases of his love for Madonna Laura, and consist of two main divisions, those written before the death of his mistress and those subsequent to that event. They are composed with exquisite art, and despite the indifference with which Petrarch affected to treat them, it is evident that he was no stranger to the use of the file. In 1642 Ubaldini discovered an autograph of Petrarch, the margins of which are crowded with variants, showing the insatiable desire which possessed him for perfection of form. About the skill and beauty of his sonnets there can be no controversy. For six centuries they have given him a place in the estimation of his countrymen on a plane with Ariosto and only a little lower than Dante himself. There remains a question, however, how far his emotions were deep and sincere.

Perhaps we shall best hit the mark if we say of Petrarch that he is the prince of sentimentalists. The title 'king of poets,' which the flattery of the age adjudged to him, he frankly disclaimed, not that he thought himself unworthy of it, but because he had *de facto* no sphere in which to exercise

his sovereignty. The reader may suppose that he was pointing to Dante, by whom, with his magnificent trilogy, he had been effectually forestalled. Such, however, was not Petrarch's thought. He was the spoilt child of his time; and courted as he was by the great, followed, wherever he went, by the popular applause, he may be forgiven for somewhat exaggerating his own importance, for failing immediately to realise the impassable gulf between himself, an excellent sonneteer, and a great constructive genius like Dante. The truth is, however, that Petrarch did not regard himself merely as a sonneteer, nor was it his aim, at any rate his sole aim, to distinguish himself by his vernacular writings. The poets whom he cites as in possession of the throne are Homer and Virgil, and it was by a Latin epic, *Africa*, that he hoped to attain immortality. On the strength of this poem he was solemnly crowned with laurel in the Campidoglio at Rome, and his prose writings in the same language are almost as numerous as those of Alexander Ross. He was also a diligent collector of manuscripts, and exerted himself in every way to resuscitate the study of the classics. Singularly enough the fraternity of learned men, steeped in mediaeval prejudices, refused to acknowledge him as a brother, and their verdict upon him was that he was a person of worth but *illiterate*.

Late in life Petrarch seems to have awoke to the real tendency of the age, which was all in favour of the moderns, and the consequent danger to his own reputation. It was then that he attempted to buy back the precious time which he had wasted on learned miscellanies, but lacking either the discretion or the power to strike out a new line, projected a work which was a faint reflex, an indistinct echo of the *Commedia*. The very metre, *terza rima*, betrays the source from which it

was inspired, and a closer inspection of the poem reveals other points of resemblance which cannot have been accidental. The work is a series of Triumphs (*Trionfi d'Amore, della Castità, della Morte, della Fama, del Tempo, della Divinità*), of which the ostensible subject is the poet and his love, but which by implication takes in the destiny of man. Considered away from the *Commedia*, the *Trionfi* are very noble poems, set off by innumerable ornaments, and if some trace of artificiality be found in them, some word-play which is not quite in keeping with the dignity of the subject, such defects can hardly affect our judgment of the work as a whole. There is no great poet with whom, if we chose, we cannot find fault in matters of detail.

Petrarch, although he held ecclesiastical benefices, and had in the abstract a strong *penchant* for ethics, was by no means correct in his private life. Yet people were so infatuated with him that, in addition to his other honours, he was reputed a saint. The truest description of him is that of a voluptuous recluse. His politics, like his verses, were of the sentimental order. With the municipal factions of his day, as was only to be expected, he, a citizen of Avignon, had no sympathy, and, although he affected indignation at the presence of foreign arms in Italy, he took care not to compromise himself, personally, with those (the King of Naples, for example) whose friendship was advantageous to him.

With the Court at Avignon is associated the name of another Italian, Francesco da Barberino (1264–1348), who wrote two quasi-didactic poems, *Documenti d' Amore* and *Reggimenti delle Donne*. At the mention of the first our thoughts naturally recur to Ovid's *Ars Amoris* and the *Roman de la Rose*, but the *Documenti* bear no resemblance to either. According to Francesco love is the mother of

the virtues. The latter, twelve in number, are treated separately in as many books, each being introduced by a proem. The work is chiefly remarkable for the luxuriance of its metres, which are perpetually changing. The *Documenti* were intended for gentlemen; the *Reggimenti delle Donne*, as the name implies, for ladies. The latter is partly in verse, partly in prose, and there are occasional descriptive touches suggesting that Francesco might have attained to some eminence as a prose-writer. Unluckily he yielded to a temptation which almost proved fatal to Boccaccio, that of consulting his ambition rather than his faculty.

Before treating of Boccaccio, we must refer to a group of writers who, although famous in another department of letters, were so far in agreement with him as to make prose the channel of their communications—the three Villani. The eldest Giovanni (†1348) undertook a formal history of Florence beginning, like the older chronicles, with the Tower of Babel. In the opening chapters he borrows freely from Malespini and similar authorities, reproducing their most extravagant fables without any attempt to correct them. When, however, he approaches the events of his own day, he puts aside this perfunctoriness and approves himself both an acute and an impartial historian. He was a Guelf in politics, and in 1316 was one of the Priors of the city of Florence, but he castigates his own party with as little mercy as the Ghibellines. His obvious fairness, and the pains he was at to investigate the causes of phenomena, constitute him an authority for the vicissitudes of Florence during the period in question. In 1348 Giovanni Villani was carried off by the pestilence, but his work was taken up by his brother Matteo, and, subsequently, by his nephew and the son of Matteo, Filippo Villani. The last mentioned wrote also, but in Latin, the lives of those

Florentines who up to that date had distinguished themselves in literature.

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) was the son of a merchant, commonly styled 'da Certaldo,' but the circumstances of his birth are otherwise not a little obscure. His mother is stated to have been a Parisian, and it was, and is, the prevalent belief that he was born out of wedlock. The fact is worth noting, as Boccaccio, during the greater part of his life, was a libertine on principle, and seems to have been wholly untouched by that affectation of delicacy which led others as much as possible to spiritualize their emotions, if not in their hearts, at least in their confessions. He was brought up in Italy, and received his first lessons in the school of Giovanni da Strada. Hence he was removed in order that he might qualify for the career of a merchant. But Boccaccio, whose taste for literature had gained for him, whilst still a boy, the epithet of 'poet,' showed himself utterly unsuited for business, and his father, willing to gratify him, sent him to study canon law. According to one account his master was Cino da Pistoia. Boccaccio spent six years attempting to reconcile himself to this pursuit, but in the end gave up the struggle and abandoned himself to letters.

Boccaccio's first essay was inspired by his passion for a lady who, he more than hints, was the natural daughter of King Robert of Naples. Boccaccio first saw her in a church, and the same year gave an idealised version of the affair in his *Fiammetta.* Some critics have doubted the truth of the narrative, and have detected contradictions in the different presentments of his amour, for to it he several times recurs, and evidently thought of it as highly praiseworthy. It is to be feared, however, that the unedifying recital was not mere boasting on Boccaccio's part. From

relating his own adventures, Boccaccio proceeded to describe the loves of other people. He commenced with the story of Florio and Biancafiore in *Filocopo*, a prose novel, and this was followed by the *Teseide* (translated by Chaucer) and *Filostrato*, both of which were in verse. All three works are characterized by the same general traits. Though in the last two instances the subjects are drawn from the sphere of classical mythology, the manner in which they are dealt with is throughout romantic. Except for the first-named accident Boccaccio might have been claimed as the creator of the new romantic epic. In both poems he uses the *ottava* or eight-lined stanza, the invention of which has been sometimes, though erroneously, ascribed to him.

Hardly as might have been thought, Boccaccio was a devoted lover of Dante, and attempted a poem on the same lines as the *Commedia*. The *Amorosa Visione*, for this was the title of the poem, was written before Petrarch's *Trionfi*, to which it is decidedly inferior. The fact is Boccaccio, with all his powers of description, was entirely destitute of the faculty which success in this class of writing pre-eminently demands—that of executing vivid and striking images in a few pregnant touches. Boccaccio, who in *Filostrato* and *Teseide* had already shown a predilection for classical mythology, returns to the same source in two other compositions—his *Caccia di Diana* and *Ameto*. The former is a symbolical representation of the Court of Naples. The Diana Partenopea of the piece is Queen Giovanna, and the nymphs are her ladies. These are all described under their own names, except Fiammetta, who, it appears, was really called Maria. *Ameto*, as the name suggests, is a pastoral. A medley of prose and verse, it afterwards served as a model for Sannazzaro, Bembo, and Menzini. The author entitled

it *Commedia delle Ninfe fiorentine*, and Ameto is shown in it as a father-confessor, to whom a bevy of ladies confide their secrets. Madonna Fiammetta, who is of the party, details her love-passages with the poet, and Ameto is at length won from his churlishness to a duteous adoration of the sex.

None of these works became popular, chiefly because Boccaccio made a point of importing into the language Latin constructions, and even went so far as to fashion his style on the precepts of rhetorical treatises to which Latin authors themselves seldom conformed. His *Life of Dante*, however, which is written in a charmingly simple vein, proved an exception to the general fate of his writings, partly no doubt from the subject, which Italians found very interesting. Another exception was his *Corbaccio*, a long malediction against the race of women, and especially a certain widow, to whom Boccaccio had thought proper to pay attentions, and who, in return for his flattery, had only quizzed him. Boccaccio, the gallant, the hero of numerous conquests, in his rage at this discomfiture, behaved like a wild boar, and attacked blindly and indiscriminately the entire female sex, which at other times he so passionately worshipped. This extraordinary change of front and the heartiness of his objurgations naturally drew attention to a work which will always keep its place as a literary curiosity. In addition to his *Life of Dante*, Boccaccio, who was appointed by the City of Florence to lecture on the *Commedia*, began a commentary on that work which he did not live to complete. His greatest achievement, however, is beyond question the *Decamerone*, a volume of tales in prose, the origin of which was as follows:

In 1348 Florence was decimated by the plague, and Boccaccio feigns that seven ladies and three cavaliers, in order to escape the horrors of the pestilence, retire to a

country-house, where they beguile the time by telling stories. This continues for the space of ten days, whence the title of the book (*δέκα ἡμέραι*). Boccaccio was not at Florence when this visitation occurred; therefore he saw nothing of the calamities attending it, but, in order probably to lend dignity to his work, he sets out with an historical exordium in which, on evidence collected from other people, he describes the ghastly episode. The *Decamerone* is almost entirely free from Boccaccio's characteristic faults. He neither obtrudes his learning nor does he, as in his earlier works, waste himself on accessories. If he still clings to the period, it must be owned that he is master of it. He found Italian prose crude, undeveloped, and left it, after various experiments in which, as we have seen, he was not wholly successful, mature. The *Decamerone* is remarkable for its freshness and variety. The author seems bent on displaying his versatility, and changes from grave to gay with surprising ease and with no sensible diminution of power. The reputation of the *Decamerone* was immense and not confined to Italy. France, Germany, and Spain speedily possessed themselves of it through the medium of translations, while in England it suggested to Geoffrey Chaucer the idea of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Great, however, as was the popularity of the *Decamerone* among the laity, it incurred the censure of the Church. They were unwilling, however, to give him up to the consequences of his own evil life, and in 1361 Boccaccio received a visit from a certain Frate Ciani, who had been commissioned by a dying Carthusian to warn him of his approaching end and exhort him to repentance. Boccaccio was panic-struck, and in the depth of his contrition would have taken measures for the destruction of his entire works.

Before finally committing himself to this step he wrote to Petrarch, who ridiculed his fears and strongly dissuaded him from the sacrilegious act. The shock, however, was too much for Boccaccio's stoicism. He destroyed his unpublished vernacular writings, got back as many copies as he could of his published works, especially of the *Decamerone*, and wrote to friends whom he knew to possess copies not to allow them to be read by women and children. The caution was not unnecessary, but it would be too much to allege that Boccaccio had a deliberate object of corrupting the morals of the age. It was rather the morals of the age which corrupted Boccaccio.

No account of this famous writer would be complete without mention of him in another character—that of an enthusiastic student of Greek literature. In 1360, the next year after his paroxysm, he fell in with a certain Leonzio Pilato, who was a native of Calabria and had spent many years in the Levant. This man, who, to quote Boccaccio's description, was a walking library, was induced to stay three whole years at Florence, where Boccaccio lodged him at his own house and listened to him reciting the poems of Homer. Instructed by what he had heard, Boccaccio put forth a mythological work, or, as he called it, a Genealogy of the Gods. Largely through his example a number of clever young men dedicated themselves to the same noble study; and ultimately Chrysoloras was elected by the Florentines professor of Greek at the public charge.

The *Decamerone* was quickly followed by other works of a similar scope; first of all, by the *Pecorone* of Ser Giovanni Fiorentino. Compared with its model, the *Pecorone* is a very limp performance. A sober youth of Florence makes love to a sober nun of Forli, and having won the connivance of the prioress and sisters to their very innocent expressions of

attachment, he makes it his practice to visit the convent at a certain hour, when the pair relate stories. These stories are all that can be desired from a moral point of view, but the writer possesses no imagination, and his sole merit, if he has any, lies in his style, which, though not splendid, is clear, simple, and direct, and well adapted to the purpose of narration. A novelist of a very different stamp was Franco Sacchetti (? 1330–1400), a contemporary both of Boccaccio and Ser Giovanni. He was a Florentine magnate, and spent the greater part of his life in the service of the state. He essayed many sorts of composition, beginning with poetry. He was particularly successful in light verse and satire, and for their excellence some of his writings have been thought worthy to be compared with Berni's. Sacchetti wrote also some hundreds of love sonnets, but he is now remembered chiefly, if not exclusively, for his novels, of which he proposed to write three hundred, and actually completed two hundred and seventy-eight. Although very slight, his stories are models of construction. They display no slavish imitation of Boccaccio. Sacchetti indeed is in some respects the antithesis of this last. Boccaccio, even in the *Decamerone*, was still something of a poet, a scholar, an artist, a philosopher—in short, an idealist. Sacchetti, on the contrary, was a man of the world, a shrewd intent observer of external things. Therefore in his work rather than the *Decamerone* we must seek the germ of the modern novel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRAMA AND THE ROMANTIC EPIC.

THE fifteenth century, the period at which we have now arrived, is marked by the development of two distinct species of literature—the drama and the romantic epic. About the success of the Italians in the former there has never been any doubt, but critics, both within the peninsula and without, have often lamented the feebleness of the Italian stage. This view of the matter is not entirely just. Italy, it is true, can boast of no Shakespeare, but a nation which has produced an Alfieri, a Goldoni, and created the classic opera and the classic pantomime, can hardly be termed poor in dramatic qualities. At present, however, it will be proper to consider the Italian play in its more primitive state. In Italy, as in Europe generally, the drama was revived under the protecting aegis of the Church. The purpose of the clergy in fostering the art seems to have been twofold. Partly they wished to present object-lessons in religion, partly to guard against the license into which popular exhibitions were too liable to degenerate. These ecclesiastical performances were known by various names. They were called mysteries, moralities, feasts, miracle plays, but the generic description of Italian mediaeval plays was *representations*. In the north of Europe such works were nearly always gross and inartistic, and often

profane in tone, but from the worst of these faults the Italian examples are conspicuously free.

The first dramatic composition which merits serious attention is by a contemporary of Dante, **Albertino Mussato** (1262–1329). The drama to which he gave the name of *Ezzelino de Romano* is in Latin, but claims a place here as founded on events of the age and appealing to popular sympathies. It is conceivable that if Mussato had been a Florentine instead of a native of Padua, he might have employed the vernacular, but the Paduan dialect was very unlike literary Italian, and even the latter supplied no models of dramatic writing. It is therefore easy to understand why Mussato imitated as nearly as possible the Latin tragedians, and wrote in their language. A still earlier play, supposed to date from the time of Frederick Barbarossa, and in Latin—very barbarous Latin, however—is of a yet more popular character. Its subject is the coming and death of Antichrist, and many believe that it is from the hand of the Emperor himself. It is notable as the earliest specimen of melodramatic composition in modern times, but as it is not in Italian, any more extended notice of it would be out of place.

The origin and chronology of Italian representations are both excessively obscure. Villani, under the year 1304, alludes to a custom which he says was of long standing at Florence—the custom of exhibiting in spectacular form popular ideas of the other world; and from the terms of his reference he would seem to imply that the actors spoke. It is probable therefore that this was a play of the same general description as that which has been just mentioned, but almost certainly in Italian. With regard to the subjects of the representations they are drawn for the most part from the Old and New Testament and the Lives of Saints, but

instances occur in which the writers, overstepping these limits, deal with scenes of everyday life. The most unsatisfactory are those which are directly based on Biblical narratives, as the dramatist could not there make free use of his imagination without exposing himself to the charge of profanity. Such works are therefore little more than mere verbal reproductions of the Sacred Text. The dramas suggested by the chronicles, lives of the saints, and episodes of common life have far more colour and vivacity, but are deficient in measure and proportion. It is likely that they were produced with a great deal of splendour, as they were written for occasions of public rejoicing, and the services of famous artists—Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Pollaio, &c.—were demanded for the decorations.

Nor were the playwrights altogether insignificant. As respects the majority of these dramas, it is true, the authorship is unknown, but this is by no means universally the case. The most celebrated of these early dramatists is **Feo Belcari** (1410–1484), but he owes his prominence less to his own merits than to his having obtained the suffrages of the Dellacruscans. It may fairly be questioned whether he is actually superior to **Castellano Castellani**, a more prolific writer, or to **Antonia**, wife of **Bernardo Pulci**. Pulci himself wrote dramas, and even **Lorenzo de' Medici** did not disdain the attempt. The metre of the representations is commonly the *ottava* for the dialogue, while the lyrical portions copy the rhythms of the canzonet. Occasionally the *terza rima* is used. Oddly enough to our notions, where the personages include a doctor of law or medicine, whole stanzas of Latin hendecasyllabics are foisted in, as though it were understood that such learned persons spoke only that tongue.

The attitude of men of learning towards the sacred repre-

sentations is a subject of deep interest. It was not wholly friendly. Bernardo Pulci and Castellano Castellani, certainly, were professors, and another playwright, **Alessandro Roselli**, was a renowned writer of Latin verses, but then they did not regard the drama seriously. They wrote either for their own amusement or the diversion of their audience. The growing enthusiasm for antiquity, which is so marked a feature of the fifteenth century, brought the representations into still greater disfavour with the world of learning. The contemporary drama knew no distinctions of tragic and comic, lyrical and satirical, but all these elements were present in inextricable confusion. To the multitude, for whom the spectacle was designed, there may have appeared nothing very dreadful in this state of things, but scholars, when they came to know and admire the masterpieces of Aeschylus and Sophocles, seem to have felt a kind of despair and relinquished all attempts to improve the native play. This was unfortunate, as the representations, with all their extravagance, afforded a more promising field to anyone possessing real abilities than study and imitation of the ancients.

The first author of an Italian drama is usually stated to have been **Angelo Poliziano** (1454–1494): but Poliziano, a great scholar, was the author not of the first Italian drama, but of the first *classical* Italian drama. Not that there was any essential difference in structure or method between his *Orfeo*, at least in its earliest form, and the Representations, but the poet, having received the compliments of the learned on his attempt, fancied that he could improve on his first sketch, and without making any sweeping alterations in the plot, re-touched the poetry and divided the drama into five acts. Thus the regularity of the *Orfeo* is in a certain sense an accident, since the author, if he had sought the

applause of scholars, would no doubt, following the precedent of Mussato, have written in Latin, whereas if the entertainment of the lay-people had continued to be his object, he would have left the *Orfeo* as it originally was. Probably for this reason the example proved sterile.

After all, it must be confessed that this first period of the Italian drama is not brilliant, though it deserves more attention than is usually paid to it. The fortunes of the new epic poetry were very different.

The romantic epic is enriched by three streams of legend which have to do with Arthur of England, Charlemagne, and Amadis of Gaul. Of the three Charlemagne, from an Italian point of view, is incomparably the most important. He is to Christendom what Aeneas was to Rome, and his historical character has been entirely superseded and overlaid by his mythical or acquired personality. The chief repository of the legends concerning him is the Latin chronicle of S. Jago, attributed by its author to Archbishop Turpin, the Emperor's spiritual peer, and the N. French *chansons de geste*, which were very popular in Italy. Charlemagne's real exploits in Germany where he defeated the Saxons, and in Italy where he overthrew the Lombards, were not forgotten, but romancers delight in celebrating his expedition to Spain, despite its calamitous issue. The reason is not far to seek. The Moors stood in the same relation to the Emperor's Frankish chivalry as the Saracens afterwards stood to the Christians. Hence it was easy for writers to invest their narrative with associations and sentiments which had grown up during the Crusades.

The primitive home of the romance was in North Gaul, and it long remained a French monopoly. Dante in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* states that all romances of chivalry dispersed throughout Europe were in the French language.

This assertion and his complete silence as regards Italy seem conclusive that there were up to that time no Italian romances, for, had there been any, Dante would certainly have heard of them, and would almost as certainly have quoted them. Nevertheless, three early narrative poems, imitated from the French and entitled *Spagna*, *Buovo d' Antona*, and *Regina Ancroja*, have been thought to be anterior to Dante, not from external evidence, but from the difficulty of supposing that verses of such rude workmanship can have been composed subsequently. One thing is known—that down to the closing years of Petrarch's life romances were little esteemed among the learned.

Romances were of two kinds: the earlier intended to be sung, which were in verse, and those of later type in prose which were read or recited. Thus in addition to the three poems before cited there is an excellent prose harmony of the Cycle of Charles the Great, entitled *Reali di Francia*, and one still more celebrated to which Boccaccio refers in his *Corbaccio* as a popular romance of the day—*Febus*. As to the writers of these works we are completely in the dark. After 1400 the romances were quickly multiplied, and the interest of their material attracted superior intellects, e. g. Luigi Pulci and Boiardo, who perceived that they could be turned to excellent account with new handling.

Pulci (1431–1484) was the author of an epic called after oné of the personages, *Morgante Maggiore*. The real hero is Orlando [Roland], nephew of Charlemagne, who goes in search of adventures. During part of his travels he is accompanied by a giant whom he had forcibly converted to Christianity, the same Morgante. It is significant that Charlemagne is here stripped of many of his venerable attributes, and appears as the confederate and dupe of the traitor Gano [Ganelon]. Pulci's object in thus violating

tradition doubtless was to exalt Orlando, who gains additional *éclat* from the contrast of his uncle's imbecility. In the epilogue, however, Pulci makes tardy reparation to the great emperor, recalling his thousand benefits and naming him divine. This variation of the *Morgante* from previous accounts signalizes a new departure in letters. Hitherto romancers had clung timidly to the authentic tradition, and respected the autobiographic version, as it was thought, of Archbishop Turpin. Pulci breaks through this restraint. Adhering to the theory of a historical foundation, he taxes the chroniclers with an omission.

The question has been raised, in what sense the *Morgante* is to be understood. Is it a sincere and serious writing? Portions of it are so extravagant, so grotesque, so *bizarre*, that the idea has inevitably occurred to some minds that the poet nourished a design similar to that of Cervantes, and in reality was merely mocking at the institutions of chivalry. This notion, however plausible at first, seems to be refuted by the circumstance that the age was still to a large extent under the sway of romantic sentiments, with which Pulci was hardly the man to place himself in conflict. Furthermore, the work was taken up at the desire of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, a very religious lady, who begged Pulci, already famous for his ballads, to compose a poem on Charlemagne. The capricious mixture, therefore, as it seems to us, of the various sorts of literature in *Morgante*, requires a different explanation. The truth is, Pulci wrote at a time when there existed no canons of taste to guide or dissuade him in the conduct of a vernacular epic. Hence it is characterized by the same multiplicity, the same chaos of ingredients which we have already observed in the drama.

The *Morgante*, faulty or not, was immensely relished, and

from 1401, the date of its first publication, to the close of the century, ran through five editions. It was in all probability the success of this romance which induced Count **Matteo Boiardo** of Scandiano (1434–1494) to attempt a similar feat. With admirable judgment he did not imitate the eccentricities of Pulci. He cultivated, rather, a grave style, with the result that the *Orlando* is loftier, more epic than the *Morgante*. The hero is in both instances the same, but supports a different character; in the *Morgante* he is a chafed and angry warrior, in the *Orlando* the lover of Angelica. The latter is wholly the creation of Boiardo, though, like Pulci, he affects the historian, and makes out that Turpin has ignored the affair, as derogatory to the paladin. Altogether Boiardo sketched no less than sixty-nine cantos, but it may be inferred from the cast of the poem that he contemplated a still larger work which was to embrace the whole of chivalry. His *Orlando* has many merits. The episodes are disposed with considerable skill, the characters are well drawn, and the situations dramatic, but the romance has one defect for which all these excellences only imperfectly atone:—the execution is rude. Not only are provincialisms frequent, but verbiage which needs to be pruned, and versification which is not always harmonious, contribute to mar the delightfulness of the poem. It has been twice reconstructed, at the hands of Domenichi and Berni. The *rifacimento* of Domenichi is now forgotten, but Berni's version may almost be said to have saved *Orlando Innamorato*—that and the famous continuation of Ariosto. To both these poems there will be occasion to refer later.

The length and particularity with which these epic compositions have been described may tend to disguise from some minds the discredit into which the vernacular literature

had actually fallen. It is well therefore to insist that none of these writings, neither the *Morgante* of Pulci, nor Boiardo's *Orlando*, are at all comparable with the masterpieces of the age which preceded or of that which came after. Alfieri summed up the period in a memorable phrase—'*il quattrocento sgrammaticava*' ('the fifteenth century was a solecism'). The sentence is rather too sweeping, or admitting its applicability, it is true only of a portion of the time under review. The fact is, barbarism rushed in like a flood soon after the death of Petrarch (1375), and continued to infect the native literature to the middle of the ensuing century, after which it slowly receded, until a new and brilliant era—the 'golden age,' as it has been called—was inaugurated in 1494. Politically this year was one of the most unlucky in the annals of Italy, being the date of the invasion of Charles VIII, but it put an end to certain conditions which rank among the principal causes of the decline of Italian literature. Without some explanation a good deal of what has just been said would remain a riddle. A short paragraph, therefore, may be fitly dedicated to a statement of the causes why vernacular composition was not maintained at the height to which Dante and Petrarch had brought it.

The reader will not have forgotten that Petrarch and Boccaccio had, as it were, a dual personality, and were divided in their allegiance between the Latin and the Italian muse. The restoration of classical Latinity as the medium of polite writing was the dream of Petrarch's life, and Boccaccio, as we have seen, was a fervent propagator of the same literary cult. The epoch which we have just been considering produced the harvest of which they sowed the seed. All the able young men were absorbed in philology, archaeology, philosophy. The revival of learning, it may

almost be said, was the extinction of originality. It was not merely that they wrote in Latin, but being in perpetual dread of committing a solecism, and thus exposing themselves to the same ridicule which they launched at the scholastics, they were sorely hampered in expressing their ideas. The spell which these pursuits exercised over the choicest spirits of the age has been likened to the glamour of the Crusades. Just as the Knights hoped to win back the Holy Land from the impious pagans, so it was the generous ambition of Italian scholars to win back the glorious past of Latin civilisation. Prominent among the supporters of the new movement was Cosimo de' Medici, the great merchant of Florence, who was virtual tyrant there, and, like Pisistratus of Athens, was the founder of the first public library in his native city. Another friend of the humanists was Pope Nicholas V, and it might have been expected that Pius II who, as Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, had been a voluminous writer, would have shown equal enthusiasm. On his elevation to the Papacy, however, he forsook the humanities for religion, promoting crusades and other extravagances which were no longer in keeping with the temper of the age. Paul II, reverting to the policy of Eugenius IV, did not even tolerate the humanists.

The first to raise the vernacular literature from the low estate into which it had fallen was Lorenzo, grandson of Cosimo de' Medici, and surnamed 'the Magnificent' (1448-1492). In a conclave of the Academy, an institution founded by Cosimo, and including among its members Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano, Marsilio Ficino, it was solemnly decided that the vernacular was worthy of study. Lorenzo himself led the way by inditing poems in Italian, *Nencia de Barberino*, the plaint of a country swain, and *Beoni*, which professes to describe the adventures of certain drunkards.

Already reference has been made to Angelo Poliziano as a dramatist. To this must be added a few words with respect to his *Stanze*, a work which he is said to have written at the extraordinarily early age of fourteen. In the year 1468 were held two tournaments to celebrate the conclusion of peace with Venice. In the first Lorenzo de' Medici won the prize, whilst Giuliano was victorious in the second. Lorenzo's triumph was commemorated in a short poem by Pulci, and Poliziano was prompted by his success to attempt a much longer and more ambitious effusion on the joust of Giuliano. Although written in Italian, the *Stanze* read like a translation, or at least adaptation, from some classical author. His *Poesie Varie* or minor poems are more original.

In the sphere of poetry these are perhaps the only works which merit distinct mention. Regarding prose, the characteristic product of the age, and clearly derived from the study of Plato, is the Dialogue. This was the form in which Galileo, long after, published his conclusions, but in the sixteenth century it was put out of fashion by the grammarians. The chief work of the sort belonging to the age with which we are now dealing is *Il Governo di Famiglia*, formerly attributed to Agnolo Pandolfini, but of which Leone Battista Alberti, who wrote also on architecture, appears to have been the author.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOLDEN AGE. THE PROSE-WRITERS.

At the commencement of the sixteenth century Italian literature had already completed its cycle. After this, although there was no lack of writers, no new forms were developed, and, except in prose, hardly any real progress was made in the art of composition. Yet the era has been named, for reasons which will shortly appear, the Golden Age. A good deal of misconception exists with regard to the personages who, either as authors or patrons of literature, attained distinction during this period, especially two, of whom it will be necessary to speak at some length, since the one has been unjustly maligned, the other not less unjustly extolled. These are Leo X and Machiavelli. The general opinion of the former is that he was, not indeed a model Pope, but with respect to culture, the incarnation almost of good taste, the Augustus of the sixteenth century. There is no doubt some colour for this belief—the Pope was at least a scholar—yet it is certain that Leo X cared infinitely more for the aggrandizement of the Medici than learning or the fine arts. A notable instance of his hatred of candour and true dignity in others is his behaviour to Michelagnolo, and the writers to whom he owes his fame were courtiers, mere venal scribes,

hardly more worthy of esteem than the clowns with whom at other times the Supreme Pontiff took his pleasure. With the exception of Raffael, not a great man then living profited by Leo's favour. Patronage of men of learning was indeed one of the attributes of a prince, but the persons whom Leo elected to subsidize were, in many instances, teachers of rhetoric or grammar with no obvious claim on his generosity. Ariosto was rewarded by an empty kiss on the cheek. Machiavelli, whom he had commissioned to draw up a constitution for Florence, provoked his displeasure by his patriotic republican ardour. The scheme was torn up and Machiavelli left unrewarded. Giannotto and Nardi fared no better. It is hard to perceive therefore in what way literature was benefited by the pontificate of Leo X.

The conduct of the other Medici, several of whom were prominent during the same epoch, testifies to a similar degeneracy. Nevertheless, the chief historic interest of the period, so far as Italy is concerned, centres around this remarkable family, and the most dramatic event in the annals of the time is the attempt of the Florentines in 1527 to shake off their yoke. Most of the prose-writers of the age were mixed up in this affair, and it forms the subject of several histories to which allusion will be made in the sequel. At present we must return to Machiavelli, whose character, after centuries of calumny and misrepresentation, has been in some measure rehabilitated. He is now acknowledged to occupy in prose a position similar to that of Dante in poetry, and to be unquestionably the most colossal figure in the literature of the sixteenth century.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) was the son of a learned jurisconsult and a poetess, and he seems to have inherited in an equal degree the talents and inclinations of both his

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parents. He entered into the public affairs of Florence, where he held for some time the high office of Secretary of the Republic. Being a warm lover of freedom, however, he incurred the suspicions of those who were bent on subverting the old institutions, and was deprived of his post. He thereupon retired to his country-house, and devoted himself to the composition of those works which have since gained for him universal interest and renown. The most famous of them is *Il Principe*, a scientific presentment of certain very abstruse results which he had accomplished in his commentary on Livy—a treatise on political science. In spite of its evil savour, it was written, there is every reason to believe, with the best intentions. The actual design of Machiavelli is to show on what terms sovereignty can be attained and upheld, human nature remaining what it is. *Il Principe* at first sight presents no ideal, and this is probably the reason for the disappointment and disgust with which many, especially modern, readers have perused it. Certainly Machiavelli takes a very low view of ordinary morality, but the facts with which observation and experience had rendered him familiar in practical life, justified and almost necessitated this pessimism. Machiavelli had a political, as well as a scientific aim, in writing the book, and it was not adverse to liberty. He looked (as he tells us clearly in the last sentence) for the regeneration of Italy, the expulsion of the foreigner, the unity of rule. His work, in fact, was composed with a view to the freeing of his country by some petty prince whose skill and genius, assisted by the counsels of wise men, were to do what indeed was done later by the Savoyard princes. All this was perfectly understood at the time, and, had it been otherwise, Machiavelli's career is eloquent in his defence. His other works also strongly make for the assumption that *Il Principe* was an honest book.

Instead of this it came to be regarded as a convenient manual for tyrants, and it is probable that no book has ever done more harm to its author or more mischief to humanity. Charles V, Catherine de Medicis, Henri III and Henri IV, made it their daily companion, and its fame having reached the Levant, Mustapha III caused it to be translated into Turkish. More recently Napoleon Buonaparte is said to have studied it in the hope of discovering some hints for the maintenance of his huge and ill-gotten empire.

Very different from *Il Principe* are Machiavelli's *Discorsi* on the first ten books of Livy, the ethical portions of the latter being quite unexceptionable. The *Discorsi* were written in order to illustrate modern history by the light of past events, and the author takes occasion to refer at length to various questions of contemporary interest, notably in the tenth chapter of the twelfth book, where he discusses the hindrances to Italian unity. Another work of Machiavelli somewhat resembling the last is his *Dialogues on the Art of War*, in which he displays a deep and, for a layman, astonishing acquaintance with military science. He distinguished himself also as a historian. If Villani is the Herodotus of Italy, Machiavelli is her Thucydides. Between them there had been no prose-writers of importance. True, there had been Latin historians, Leonardo Aretino, Poggio Bracciolini, and Bembo, men of sufficient note in their way, but their mode of treating history was extremely artificial, while the writings of Corio and Malvolti are woefully lacking in style. To Machiavelli therefore pertains the honour of restoring historical literature in Italy. His chief work in this department is his *History of Florence*, which is in every way remarkable. He begins with a general survey of European history, from the fall of the Roman Empire to the rise of the Italian Republics, a

precedent which has been followed by nearly all the greater historians. Not only in this introduction but also in the main body of the narrative Machiavelli writes as a philosopher, not content with stringing together a number of facts, but seeking to arrange them so as to show their inter-dependence. The style is admirable—lucid, piquant, and free from mannerisms, the model of what a historical style should be.

The next considerable name in the roll of historians is that of his countryman and contemporary, **Guicciardini** (1482–1540). He was one of the prime movers in the counter-revolution which made Cosimino de' Medici Duke of Florence. Guicciardini had stipulated as his reward that he himself should be the young man's foster-father and his daughter duchess. No sooner, however, had Cosimino secured himself on the throne of Florence than he immediately ignored these pledges, and Guicciardini withdrew in high dudgeon to his country-house at Arcetri. To console himself for this mortifying defeat, he wrote a general history of Italy, commencing from the descent of Charles VIII and extending to the year 1534. This work is of great importance, since the events which it records had the effect of so fixing the political conditions of Italy that they remained unaltered to the French Revolution. Moreover, Guicciardini is not only an excellent writer, but he possesses what is an indispensable requisite in a historian—a sincere love of the truth.

It is a favourite charge to bring against Guicciardini that he is diffuse, that his sentences are too long, and one editor, by a copious use of commas and full stops, has placed him in splints. This process of rectification, however, has not had the desired effect, for the intricacy and length of Guicciardini's periods are due, not to carelessness, but to complexity of thought. A feature which he shares with Machiavelli and

other writers of the age is that of manufacturing speeches and putting them into the mouths of real personages. This habit they borrowed from the ancients, but it lends an air of unreality to their pages, making them seem romance rather than history. Less illustrious than Guiccardini as a writer, but more estimable as a man, is **Jacopo Nardi** (1476–1555), who, after failing in an attempt to restore the republic, withdrew to Venice and occupied himself with literature. He produced an admirable version of the first ten books of Livy and an arid history of the revolution of 1527. **Bernardo Segni** (1504–1558), another historian of the same dramatic episode, was blest with a more attractive style. He was a diligent translator and a member of the Florentine Academy, but the work by which he hoped to win favour with posterity was his history. It was written in defence of his maternal uncle, Niccolò Capponi, a noble patriot, who died of grief at seeing his native city enslaved; and Segni composed it in secrecy. The manuscript was found after his death and put into the hands of Cosimo. The prince having discovered that it was incapable of being edited on account of its plain-spokenness, it was for a long time neglected, and when eventually it *was* printed, bore the false imprint, Freiburg.

From these examples it became evident to Cosimo that he could not hope to silence the historians. Whether he wished it or not, they would write, taking as their theme the actions of his ancestors and his own. He was driven therefore to another expedient—that of bribing authors. Among those who were parties to this shameful bargain was Messer **Benedetto Varchi** (1502–1565), the story of whose adventures is ludicrous as well as sad. A very learned man, he was a perfect child in the ways of the world. When therefore he was requested by Cosimo to draw up a history of the times, he

accepted the commission with delight. He had made some progress with the work when he submitted it to Cosimo's hearing. The style was tedious, but that did not offend the Duke half as much as the statements which were surprisingly frank, and Benedetto had to be reminded by a prick of the stiletto that princes are not persons to be trifled with. Hence at the close of his work there is a marked change of tone. The other Medici might be sinners above all men, but the present occupant of the throne could not be excelled. He was an angel of light. Two other writers in the pay of Cosimo, **Scipione Ammirato** (1531–1601) and **Giovanni Batista Adriani** (1512–1579), adopted another method of escaping his resentment, without distorting facts, i.e. whenever they came to anything awkward, they passed it over in silence. Neither is deserving of much regard.

All these writers were natives of Florence. Elsewhere in the peninsula the most distinguished historian was **Camillo Porzio** (1526–1603), who wrote an account of the conspiracy of the barons against Ferdinand of Naples, a little work which is almost unique in respect of terseness and elegance. A general history of the kingdom of Naples was composed by **Angelo di Costanzo** (1507–1591), who bestowed on it infinite pains, but who with all his talents and industry failed to reach Porzio's high level of excellence in this branch of literature. Angelo was also renowned as a Petrarchist. As the result of a movement to which we shall immediately refer, history now degenerated into a mere exhibition of style. As examples of these *deliciae* may be cited the *Europa* of Giambullari and the *Storie* of Daniello Bartoli, which were greatly appreciated at the time, but, except as evidence of a perverse tendency, do not come within the sphere of this discussion. A wholesome corrective might have been found in

the works of Tacitus which **Bernardo Davanzati** (1529–1606), remembered also as one of the earliest writers on political economy, translated about this time. Unluckily Davanzati himself was too much infected with the vices of his age to be of much service in bringing about a reform.

The Latinists of the sixteenth century were succeeded in the next by the grammarians, who applied themselves to purifying the Italian language, and formed themselves into a school of critics. The reader will not have forgotten the Accademia Platonica, whose resolution in the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent had produced so beneficial an effect on Italian literature. Somewhat on the model of this institution, but at first without official recognition, was established another academy, whose members dubbed themselves *umidi*. Cosimo, always on the watch for opportunities of strengthening his position, determined to give it his sanction. He altered its name to Accademia Fiorentina, and appointed as its officers a consul and two councillors. After this institution had been some time in existence, a schism arose among its members, and **Anton Francesco Grazzini** (1503–1583), better known by the name of Lasca, was expelled. Unwilling to give up criticism, he joined with several friends in forming a private club, in which for their own diversion they discoursed on literature. The celebrated **Lionardo Salviati** was invited to their assemblies, and on his proposal a regular academy was instituted, with the quaint description 'della Crusca.' The meaning of *crusca* in Italian is 'bran,' which the baker separates from flour by bolting; and the new academy, conformably with its title, undertook the task of freeing the vernacular from improper ingredients. The members fixed on the fourteenth century as the age of gold, and among the writers of that period selected, as was most

natural, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio as models. The choice of the first was inevitable,—it was hopeless to think of deposing the greatest of Florentines from the place which he occupied in public esteem, but more after the Dellacruscan mind, to which their very faults seemed virtues, were the lesser lights, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

In order to expedite their plan the academicians resolved to compile a dictionary, a notable undertaking which could hardly fail to be serviceable to the Italians themselves and to other nations which might perchance imitate it. A question arose as to the proper name of the language. In the earliest times, as we have seen, it was called Sicilian, and afterwards, because that province had been most prolific in writers and those of the highest distinction, Tuscan. Among the cities of Tuscany, however, Florence was easily the first in cultivation and refinement, and the speech of the people approached most closely to the literary dialect. The Dellacruscans therefore proposed to christen the language Florentine. A fierce controversy broke forth on the subject, and the whole peninsula was in arms for the Italian character of the language. It was *à propos* of this that Georgio Trissino published his translation of Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which, as has been before shown, the author impartially condemned the dialects of *all* the cities, including his own. The contest was accentuated and rendered personal by a quarrel between Ludovico Castelvetro and Annibale Caro, over a poem which the former had written in honour of the Royal House of France and Caro had sharply criticised. The world of letters split itself into two camps, and Varchi, the historiographer of Cosimo, leapt into the fray with his enormous tome *Ercolano*, wherein he laboured to prove, in several hundred pages, that the language ought to be called

Florentine. Varchi, however, neither convinced nor quelled his adversaries, and the dispute went on smouldering for a century or more.

The most noted member of this celebrated academy was Salviati, who will always be remembered as a persecutor of Tasso. Under the pseudonym of *'Nfarinato* and assisted by a companion in arms, Bastiano de' Rossi, whose nickname was *'Nferrigno,* Salviati wrote several polemical pieces against the poet, designed to tarnish the laurels which the latter had so worthily won. Tasso attempted a reply and in it sought to defend the memory of his father Bernardo, whom Salviati had brutally assailed. Tasso's mild expostulations, however, only provoked a fresh attack. Salviati, betaking himself to Ferrara, prevailed on the Duke Alfonso, whom the poet had extolled in his *Gerusalemme,* basely to accept the dedication of a book by which Tasso was finally suppressed. Of that more anon.

It is impossible to believe the fascination which these puerilities exercised over the most variously constituted minds. The rage for them seems to have been universal. **Isabella Orsini**, the daughter of Cosimo de' Medici, indited a treatise on the adverb *mai*, and the illustrious Galileo, when thirty years of age and therefore fully capable, one might have thought, of estimating such matters at their true value, turned his attention to grammar and helped to plague the soul of poor Tasso. One of the most characteristic products of this insipid school was the *cicalata,* a kind of mock oration on some trivial subject, the Lemon perhaps or Tarts. Originally it was an after-dinner speech delivered at a banquet which was given by the consul of the Academy on the day when he took office. Hence it became a recognized form of composition for all who delighted in such inanities.

Turning from this folly to works to which may be applied the term 'literature,' we are at once struck with the luxuriance of the novel. During the reign of the humanists it had been by no means eradicated, but had clothed itself in a rind of Latin, in which it was cultivated by innumerable aspirants. The most noteworthy perhaps of these Latin novels are the *Facetiae* of **Poggio Bracciolini**. After the revival of interest in the vernacular literature, the novel regained its place as the most popular form of literature. Here also Machiavelli is *facile princeps*. He is said by Bandello to have written several tales, but only his *Belfegor* has survived to our days. Conceived in a comic spirit, it is full of inimitable touches of life and character, and the style is at once graceful and vigorous. The Accademia della Crusca, which in this particular set no very great store by Machiavelli's productions, made an exception of *Belfegor*, and placed it in the canon of Italian classics.

Another novelist, and one of the most original writers of the age, was Lasca, already mentioned as the founder of the Dellacruscan Academy. His *forte* was undoubtedly personal satire, but unfortunately Lasca was not in a position to do justice to himself. He was one of a class to which the sixteenth century gave rise, the professional *littérateur*, and being compelled to earn his living by his pen, he was unable to give to his works that artistic finish which, had circumstances been more propitious, with his splendid endowments, he could no doubt have imparted to them. Finding that the fashion set entirely towards fiction, and that the world was being flooded with *Divertimenti*, *Notti*, *Diporti*, *Mesate*, *Ecatommithi* and such like, Lasca, who had at first protested, made his appearance in the same field and produced his *Cene*, in which, forsaking the quaintnesses and fopperies of

Firenzuola, he brought back the language to a manly simplicity and directness. Instead of basing his style on the humours of the grammarians, he drew upon the resources of the spoken language, and this feature, more than the vividness of his portraiture, constitutes the peculiar excellence of his writings. The truth of this observation will become more evident if we compare the novels of Lasca with those of Molza, Parabosco, Luigi da Porto, and Bandello. The difference is to be attributed to the superior charm of the Tuscan dialect, which gave the natives of that province an immense advantage over non-Tuscan writers. For all that, Bandello, with the sole exception of Machiavelli, is incomparably greater than the Florentines, and on the score of productiveness even Machiavelli must be postponed to him. Bandello devoted himself exclusively to novel-writing (in which he was the first after Boccaccio to achieve distinction), and amid the swarm of story-tellers—who, in proportion to their readers, were as numerous then as they are now—stands forth as the most original. He introduced nothing new in the form of the novel, but, uniting the character of the historian with that of the novel-writer, depicted with quite marvellous fidelity the outer life of his contemporaries.

The novels of the period exhibit an almost painful uniformity. As to the nature of these compositions, reference has already been made to the immorality of the *Decamerone*, and it has been considered how far Boccaccio is accountable therefor. The writings of the succeeding age, oddly as it strikes us, whilst indulging in the same freedom, affect pious sentiments. Even Pietro Aretino boldly professes to be moved by a desire for the glory of God and the benefit of his fellow men. The half or wholly hypocritical plea of these philanthropists is that it is necessary, if

people are to swallow the wholesome draught, to smear the vessel's edge with a sweet liquid.

But these writers were realists who drew their materials impartially and cynically from the life which they saw around them. At the same time the spirit of reform was in the air, as was evident at the Council of Trent, and to this was due the canting and apologetic tone of the professors of an art which was essentially profane. Some novelists, it is true, like **Sebastiano Erizzo** in his *Sei Giornate* and **Cinzio Giraldi** in his *Ecatommitti*, sought to liberate themselves from the debasing traditions of their craft, and wrote wholly on moral lines; but, partly from lack of ability, they quite failed in their mission. In any case the people did not ask to be edified. As a class these novels have other defects also. They display considerable invention, but little tact in the development of the plot, and being confined to a few pages, they have the appearance of sketches or jottings for some larger work. Again, the unbroken continuity of the narrative, almost unenlivened by snatches of conversation in which the actors are permitted to speak for themselves, deprives these works of the dramatic interest good modern novels exhibit, and which in Italy at this period belongs rather to the *dialogue*.

One kind of composition which deserves a passing mention is that which consists in imitation of the classic satirical novels of the popular Apuleius and Lucian. The most important of these writings are **Gelli's** *Capricci del Bottaio* and *Circe* and the *Discorsi degli Animali* and *Asino d' Oro* of **Firenzuola**, all of which were extremely popular in their day and translated into several foreign languages.

The *dialogue*, of which an instance was quoted at the close of the last chapter, now acquired extraordinary vogue. Perhaps the most noteworthy specimen of these polished didactic

colloquies is the *Cortegiano* of **Baldassare Castiglione** (1478–1529). The author was a perfect type of the gentleman of the period, and he sets before us a faithful portrait of the ideals of the Court of Urbino to which he belonged, and which was a meeting-place of all that was distinguished in rank or intellect throughout the peninsula. *Il Cortegiano* has its full share of defects. It abounds in the ineptitudes which are so marked a characteristic of the age, but in style it leaves little to be desired. In this respect it will worthily compare with the writings of Tasso and Sperone Speroni, whose achievements in the higher departments of literature have caused their prose lucubrations to be in some measure forgotten. The *dialogue*, as has been said, owed its development to the revival of learning, principally, no doubt, to a translation of Plato's works which was published towards the end of the sixteenth century by **Marsilio Ficino.**

Another result of these studies was the impetus they gave to *letter-writing*. Guittone's example does not appear to have been generally followed, and the true source of inspiration was beyond question the letters of Cicero and Pliny, together with the spurious epistles of Plato, which erudite Italians burned to imitate. Among the first to print his letters was Pietro Aretino, greatly to the distress of the more respectable portion of society which he had omitted to consult. Amid much extravagance of language and thought, they show considerable power of expression and help to interpret the life of the Venetian society in which he and Titian and other men of mark moved. Better in every way are the epistles of Tasso, Speroni and Bembo; but even these, in freedom and choice of language, hardly attain to the level of some Tuscan writers—notably **Giovanni della Casa** (1503–1556), whose studied efforts, such as his *Galateo*,

on the contrary, are stilted and full of mannerisms. Apart from these, perhaps the best letter-writer of the age is Annibale Caro, the antagonist of Ludovico Castelvetro, and an excellent critic. Others prefer Bonfadio, who wrote some charming epistles; but taken as a whole his letters do not exhibit that grace and fluency which are the chief distinction of Caro's and constitute the primary merit of this species of literature.

No notice of this age would be complete which did not include two celebrated writers, who have a common centre in art, and who both wrote their own biographies. The first is Giorgio Vasari of Arezzo (1511–1574); the second, Benvenuto Cellini of Florence (1500–1571). Vasari, a pupil of the great Michelangelo, but himself of no high merit as a painter, published in 1550 *Vite de' più eccellenti Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti*. The author put forth a second edition of the work, greatly enlarged and improved, in 1568. Being a dutiful vassal of the Medici, who employed him to decorate the Palazzo Vecchio, Vasari dedicated the book to the Duke Cosimo. Vasari was well qualified for his task. He was distinguished by infinite enthusiasm for the arts, as well as by inexhaustible industry in research; if he was not a first-rate practitioner, he at least possessed good taste, to which he added an adequate knowledge of the technique of the subject, as is shown by the elaborate treatise which forms the preface of his work. For modern readers the charm of the book undoubtedly lies in the vivid portraits which it contains of the artists themselves. Vasari had a keen eye for character, and he was prompt to seize on typical actions, and sometimes strange aberrations, for illustrating the true nature of the men whose career he was describing. These 'touches of nature' redeem the *Vite* of Vasari from being a

mere catalogue of works of art, and invest them with human interest. Vasari has had many editors who have studied to correct his mistakes, of which, as was natural in so large and varied a compilation, there were not a few.

Cellini was a goldsmith, and skilled in all the mysteries of his craft. He piqued himself also on his literary attainments, and wrote himself down a poet, but his claims in this respect cannot be allowed without some important reservations. It is undeniable that he owes his world-wide celebrity to his pen; but, although a diligent student of Villani and Dante, Cellini was a very faulty writer. Errors either in grammar or syntax appear on every page—indeed, it is hardly too much to say, in every line. With all this, his autobiography is very pleasant reading. Cellini lived in days of unwonted excitement, and had his full share of adventures. He was at Rome at the time of the sack, and assisted in the defence of the Castel S. Angelo; he was thrown into prison on a false charge, and made a bold attempt to escape by letting himself down from a tower; and he came in contact with many notable persons—artists, men of letters, popes, and princes. Out of these varied experiences he has woven a narrative which could scarcely be excelled in interest, while at the same time it bears the stamp of truth.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLDEN AGE. THE POETS.

WHILE literature, in a general way, suffered from the cultivation of mere elegance, one species displayed unparalleled vigour and went far to justify the complimentary description of the sixteenth century as the Golden Age. The allusion is of course to the Italian epic. In the fourth chapter its history was traced as far as to the publication of Boiardo's *Orlando*. As was there observed, the epic was popular in its origin, and such it remained. The learned might debate, if they chose, about the rules for the construction of a poem on the model of the *Iliad*, but the people did not lose their taste for romance; and they were soon to be gratified by a superb composition, which at once threw into the shade all previous performances, and which has never since been equalled.

Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) was born at Reggio and attached himself to the House of Este at Ferrara, which Count Boiardo had already celebrated in his *Orlando*. Notwithstanding the fact that he had from the first cherished an unbounded admiration for that great poem, Ariosto was so far infected by the prevailing fashion as to begin his career of authorship with dramatic compositions imitated from Terence and Plautus. The epic *Orlando*, however, retained its attractions for Ariosto, who, perceiving its defects, might have been

tempted to recast it, as was afterwards done by Berni, but that an inborn sense of genius wrought with him to essay something original and containing the promise of a nobler fame. When he had decided to write an epic, he requested the learned Bembo for advice. That admirable scholar was not a foe to the Italian vernacular in general, but, like others of his order, entertained a rooted prejudice to the romance. He accordingly recommended Ariosto to compose his poem in Latin. Fortunately Ariosto had sufficient independence to disregard this advice and write in Italian. Another point on which the poet seems to have hesitated was the metre. Dante's *terza rima* was the stateliest, but in epic vernacular composition the *ottava* was prescriptive, and therefore not lightly to be set aside. There was this objection to its use —that Ariosto's scholarly predecessors had neglected it, the only exception being the polished *Stanze* of Poliziano.

It was in all probability this precedent which confirmed Ariosto in the resolution not to abandon the traditional metre, and it would have been lamentable if he had determined otherwise. Ariosto's genius was itself too rich and luxuriant, and the nature of Italian romantic poetry too fantastic and airy, for any but the freest and most exuberant of metres. The subject of the poem is Orlando [Roland], whom Ariosto conceives to be driven mad by the cruelty of Angelica. Hence the title *Orlando Furioso*. After ten years' toil the great poem first saw the light in 1516. It was recognised as a continuation of Boiardo's romance, and therefore, it was thought, could only be properly appreciated after a perusal of this last. That in a sense is true. Ariosto consciously followed in the wake of his predecessor; nevertheless the impression left by the *Orlando Furioso* is perfectly individual and distinct. Ariosto was no servile copier of

Boiardo, any more than Boiardo had been of Pulci. Certain types of character were traditional, and other points of correspondence between the two poems, such as the passages in which the author addresses his readers *in propria persona*, are common to the class and are far from implying on the part of Ariosto any special dependence on his immediate model.

All this in reference to the subject-matter and general design. When we come to examine the details we are at once sensible of an immense advance. The rude workmanship of Boiardo's *Orlando* is nowhere reflected in that of Ariosto, whose touch is always sure.

One of the more conspicuous merits of Ariosto's poem is its infinite variety. We may take as an instance his description of personal combats, of which, as is natural in a chivalrous composition, there is a constant succession. Yet no two of his duels are alike. His personages also, though they may exhibit a general resemblance, are never to be confounded. Rodomonte, we feel, is distinct from Ferraù. Mandricardo is not Gradasso, nor Ruggiero Orlando. This appears faint praise, until we remember that Ariosto was not a free agent. He was not in a position to deal summarily with the creations of popular fancy, which in their way were just as real and palpable as the shapes of history, and he was especially hampered by the uniformity of the actions which produced a corresponding likeness in the actors. If, therefore, diversity in the characters was desired, it could only be brought about by close attention to particulars.

It is in his mastery of detail that Ariosto evinces his superiority. His similes often surprise us by their force and felicity, joined sometimes to a certain homeliness—as for instance when he compares Orlando's inexpressible anguish on finding proof of Angelica's treachery to the efforts of water,

when the vessel containing it is inverted, to issue through the narrow exit. To all these virtues must be added perfection of style. Of this no better evidence is needed than the fact that the Tuscans, who were commonly very unwilling to concede this praise to anyone outside their own province, were among the most reverent admirers of the *Orlando Furioso*. Notwithstanding, however, Ariosto's unremitting study of the best authors, the first edition of his poem was not exempt from solecisms. There were Lombard words and phrases, Lombard spellings, which detracted somewhat from the otherwise happy effect. Owing to circumstances, the nature of which has not been ascertained, it fell to his lot to pass some time in Florence, and Ariosto seems to have availed himself of this opportunity to correct his inadvertences. At any rate, in 1532, sixteen years after the first, a second edition appeared, which came as near to perfection as it could well be brought.

This fact is deserving of note, as hardly any poetry produces in the mind of the reader such a sense of spontaneity as that of the *Orlando*. The verse is so fluent that we can scarcely persuade ourselves that Ariosto took any trouble over it. Yet his manuscripts testify that as an artist he was conscientious in the extreme. Some of his stanzas, indeed, were written no less than fifty times. That they run so smoothly and pleasantly after so much labour is the final proof of Ariosto's supreme attainments. In spite of its many and varied merits the poem has not gone unchallenged. One difficulty, which has exercised the minds of some, respects the unity of the poem. It has been looked upon as a string of inconsequent episodes, involving no general plot; and it must be admitted that there is much on a casual reading to excuse such a view. Further study will reveal that there are two or

three principal groups, around which the minor figures are ranged as accessories. Amidst a number of less important incidents, the dominating facts, to which all else is ancillary, are Charlemagne's enterprise against the Saracens, Orlando's frenzy, and the marriage of Ruggiero and Bradamante. Another defect which has given just offence is the frequency of monologues in which the personages with a tiresome garrulity enlarge on their sorrows. In some of these speeches it is easy to detect the *falsetto* as of some Petrarchist who tries to fancy himself in love. But, after all, such faults are not serious, and considering the greatness of the poem, it would be ungracious to insist on them. The *Orlando Furioso* is an imperishable monument of the height to which imagination can attain in its more favoured representatives.

Ariosto's success could not but affect the fortunes of the *Orlando Innamorato.* Its want of style, which had never been in doubt, was rendered more than ever apparent by comparison with its successor, and it was precisely at this juncture that Berni produced the celebrated *rifacimento.* **Berni**, however, himself (1497–1535) is sufficiently interesting to merit an independent notice. He was a Florentine of good family; but, as his means were small, his only resource was to become a hanger-on at Court. The consequences in his case were tragic. He made himself acceptable both to Alessandro and Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici; but, the relations between the pair being anything but cordial, the story goes that Berni was requested by Alessandro to poison his kinsman. The poet was horrified, and refused; but his patron, having found other means of ridding himself of his cousin, soon after, in anger at his recusancy, poisoned the unhappy Berni. Fortune had all along been unkind to him. He had every qualification for becoming a great poet, but

the atmosphere in which he lived was fatal to his intellectual development. Before he undertook the revision of the *Orlando Innamorato* his talents had been chiefly employed on a species of poetry which has been named after him *bernesque*, and the origin of which was as follows.

Among other expedients to which Lorenzo de' Medici resorted for making his usurpation more palatable to the Florentines was his encouragement of public shows, especially during the carnival season, when masked troops were wont to parade the city singing. For the ditties hitherto in vogue were substituted by Lorenzo certain rigmaroles, which were afterwards known as *carnescialeschi*, and the performers simulated drunkenness. These effusions were written by the best poets of the day, including Machiavelli, to order; but Berni had a distinct predilection for them, and in the number and variety of his writings far outstripped his competitors. Towards the end of his life there seems to have dawned on him a sense of his extraordinary powers, and of the miserable waste he had made of them; he accordingly resolved to redeem what time there was left him by application to some work which would ensure his remembrance.

To write an epic appeared the best road to fame, but Berni was well advised in not attempting one. After the *Orlando Furioso* it could only have been felt as an anticlimax. Berni set himself to a more humble task, and sought by a tasteful revision of the *Orlando Innamorato* to render it more worthy of its fellow. This he effected with a considerable degree of skill, and it is due to his pains that Boiardo's poem is still read and esteemed. But, although an amendment of the style was all Berni's contribution, even in this he cannot be allowed unqualified praise. The truth is his previous occupation somewhat unfitted him for writing in a dignified strain

such as becomes an epic. Colloquialisms were quite in place in the *canti carnascialeschi*; in a poem like the *Orlando* they are an offence. Nothing, however, can be more unfair than to tax Berni with the design of turning the whole work into a burlesque. In confutation of such a theory it is only necessary to point to the manifest improvement which has resulted from his labours. Berni invested a poem, grandly conceived indeed, but imperfectly executed, with the rich and incomparable graces of his native dialect, and therefore it is with justice that he divides the credit of the performance with the original author.

Meanwhile there had appeared certain poems which were more or less feeble imitations of the *Orlando Furioso*, the most notable being the *Girone* of **Luigi Alamanni** (1495–1556) and **Bernardo Tasso's** (1493–1569) *Amadigi*. The latter is remarkable chiefly on account of its subject, for until then writers of epics had drawn their materials almost exclusively from the Carlovingian cycle. But neither this innovation nor the merits of the poem need arrest us. It is as clear as the day that Ariosto completely defied competition. Partially, perhaps, out of a recognition of this fact, poets, or those who aspired to the name, sought for laurels in a different field, occupying themselves indeed with the composition of epics on the model of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*. The first to attempt this experiment was **Gian Giorgio Trissino** (1478–1550). His industry, however, was lamentably thrown away. Choosing as his theme the expedition of Belisarius against the Goths, who had invaded Italy and menaced her with perpetual thraldom, he gave as title to his work, *L' Italia Liberata*. Trissino's principle of selection was unexceptionable. Coleridge declared that an epic ought either to be national or mundane. Trissino proposed to make his epic

national, and if he went back to a somewhat remote stage of Italian history, the antiquity of the subject might be expected to lend it additional dignity. *À priori* all was favourable to the execution of a really great work; but it was just at this point that Trissino broke down. His talents were absurdly disproportioned to his opportunity. His faults are mainly two. In the first place, he is not satisfied with copying Homer —he fairly reproduces him. The Eternal Father is a *Zeus redivivus*, except for a few touches which could not be given without manifest profanity. As for the other gods of Olympus, they are represented by the celestial hierarchy. This perhaps might pass if Trissino had shown any capacity to go alone; but at every step he shows his dependence on Homer, stealing his best episodes only to mar them.

In fact *L' Italia Liberata* is a travestie. The poem was written in blank verse, and this was another reason serving to render it unpopular. It seems doubtful whether Trissino or the historian Nardi, in various now-forgotten comedies, was the first to employ this sort of verse in Italian; but certain it is that the experiment as an epic verse did not please. Of the different forms which poetry can assume there is none which requires more delicate handling than this blank verse, which sinks with fatal facility into prose, and in an age which was tolerant of *cicalate* Trissino was found insufferable. The calamitous issue of an attempt from which he had hoped so much was calculated to put others on their guard, and in some instances may have had that effect. There were, however, some spirits who, not perceiving this and flattering themselves that they could succeed where Trissino had failed, reiterated the effort.

Trissino, with all his faults, was respectable for his learning; but among his followers were men, like **Olivieri**, who lacked

even this recommendation; and their productions, such as the *Alamanna* of this last, which was based on contemporary history, were mere impertinences. But an exception must be made in favour of an individual—Luigi Alamanni—who has been already mentioned as the author of a romance, and who, as will be seen later, composed an excellent didactic poem.

Alamanni, although now almost forgotten, was a person of considerable importance in his own day, both in the sphere of politics and in that of letters. He conspired against Cardinal Giuliano, the representative of Leo X, and the plot having been detected, he fled to Venice and eventually to France. Some years later he returned to Florence, but, having offered some unpalatable advice to the Republic, he embarked, in company with the celebrated Andrea Doria, for Spain. Finally, he made his abode in France, where Francis I and Henry II availed themselves of his talents in diplomacy.

Alamanni was perfectly aware of the ill-success of *L' Italia Liberata*, and he set himself to meditate on the cause. He came to the conclusion that the fault lay in the verse, and decided to write a poem similar in other respects, but in the octave stanza. He drew his narrative from the legends of the Round Table. Just as the *Iliad* was named after the town of Ilium, so Alamanni's poem is called *Avarchide* from the ancient name of Bourges, which in the same way undergoes a siege and is at last captured. A further analogy is found in the characters. Thus we have presented to us, as it were, pseudonymously, Agamemnon, Achilles, Thetis, Patroclus, who, with the fewest possible changes in the stage furniture, rehearse their accustomed parts. The result showed that Alamanni in his interpretation of Trissino's

failure had erred. The *Avarchide* fared even worse than *L' Italia Liberata.* Indeed, after exciting a momentary interest, it passed clean out of men's minds. In spite, however, of all this, the Christian Italy of the Renascence was to have her *vates sacer*—the sublime Tasso.

This rare genius was the son of Bernardo Tasso, who had gained a distinguished place in the literature of his country by his romance *Amadigi.* But although he had himself won renown as a writer, and perceived in his son indications of still greater ability, he stumbled at the risks which he knew to beset this pursuit, and tried to persuade Torquato to adopt a more regular and lucrative profession. It should seem also that something of jealousy, lest his son's reputation should in time obscure his own, seconded these misgivings.

Torquato Tasso (1544–1595) was certainly a prodigy. As a child of eight he read the classics, both Greek and Latin; at twelve he was versed in the sciences; and at eighteen he wrote an epic poem, *Rinaldo.* Upon reading this Bernardo felt that he could no longer oppose his son's inclinations by forcing him to a study so little to his mind as jurisprudence. Stifling his parental fears and the less worthy feelings by which he had been visited, he gave him his blessing and suffered him to take his own course.

Rinaldo had been received with a chorus of approbation, which emboldened Tasso to make fresh efforts. Like Luigi Alamanni he reflected on the conditions of success, but more in the spirit of a philosopher. He consequently attained to a full and complete understanding of the theory of his art, which no one has ever expounded more luminously. In choosing his subject Tasso displayed great judgment. The *Gerusalemme Liberata* was at once national and universal. It was *par excellence* a religious poem; and as Italy was the

centre and sun of Christendom, it set her special glory conspicuously before the world. But Catholic Christianity shed its rays over the whole of Western Europe and claimed a universal validity. In that sense the *Gerusalemme Liberata* was of world-wide interest. In addition to this the poem was in admirable accord with the circumstances of the age. The Turks, not yet under the effete government they now have, were pushing their conquests to the very walls of Vienna, and it was proposed to form a league for the purpose of crushing them.

Tasso's poem was the fruit of long and patient thought. He left nothing to chance, to the inspiration of the moment, but sketched the general plan and pondered even the details before he sat down to write. His work when complete was a marvel of simplicity. So distinct and beautiful is the symmetry that the only instance in which the principle of unity is violated has excited the more remark. This is the story of Olindo and Sofronia, which in its particular place is clearly an intrusion. Tasso, who did not deny the justice of the criticism, had a special motive for wishing to retain the passage, since it enabled him to express his own sentiments towards the Princess Eleonora.

In his delineation of character Tasso idealises. His Goffredo is the perfection of the Christian warrior. If there is something godlike in the composition of his hero, it is little more than we can reconcile with human nature at its best. It must be admitted, however, that such faultless beings, though conceivable, do not engage our sympathy. To the ordinary mortal, conscious of much infirmity, they seem cold and unamiable. The *Gerusalemme* presents a remarkable contrast to the *Orlando Furioso* and its congeners, all of which appealed to the barbaric element in man, the love of

external show and colossal achievement. The *Gerusalemme*, on the contrary, is a poem of civilisation, for Tasso was careful to preserve, according to the ideas of the age, the *vraisemblance* of his story, and his personages do not execute feats which are manifestly incongruous and absurd. They bespeak our homage by a moral elevation which, though more worthy of esteem, is in general less captivating than frank achievement. In describing the enterprise for recovering the Holy Sepulchre, Tasso was manifestly possessed by feelings like those of Milton and the elder bards of Greece and regarded his vocation as sacred. Look at it from whatever point of view we may—the moral or the artistic—the poem always strikes us by a certain impeccability. The verse is of Hyblaean sweetness.

The *Gerusalemme* was no sooner published than a general commotion arose. Ariosto was now firmly enthroned in the hearts of the public, and there was an instinctive feeling that he was threatened, that his supremacy was at stake. Hence all the rancour of partisanship entered into the discussion of the two poems. In an unlucky hour for Tasso a certain Camillo Peregrino, a complete stranger to the poet, wrote a book in which he sought to establish the superiority of the *Gerusalemme Liberata* to the *Orlando*. This avowed preference for a new and ambitious attempt deeply annoyed the members of the Accademia della Crusca, and the resources of that formidable institution were employed for the ignoble purpose of annihilating a great man. Salviati, already pointed out as the ring-leader, drew a recantation from Peregrino by the promise of an academic diploma. At length Tasso, the mark of so many shafts, found himself isolated. The criticisms of his enemies, so far as they had to do with the aesthetic side of the poem, were dry and out of date. Tasso was tried

by laws to which his predecessors had conformed, but which he himself had deliberately rejected. Blinded by their prejudices, and bound by the decisions of an infallible conclave, his judges had no feeling for the exquisite charms with which the *Gerusalemme* was everywhere resplendent. But in regard to the style the academicians *did* detect faults. The *Orlando Furioso*, it will be remembered, on its first appearance had been open to the same censure. Tasso was so far shaken by the pertinacity of these attacks that he actually re-wrote the poem, to which, in its altered form, he gave the name of *Gerusalemme Conquistata.* This was so much labour lost. His contemporaries did not cease wrangling, and later generations, more indulgent to its peccadilloes, have been unanimous in preferring *Gerusalemme Liberata.*

The contest as to the superiority of Ariosto or Tasso is really one which depends on individual taste. Ariosto represents one principle in literature, Tasso quite another. The *Orlando* is the more sprightly poem—it is full of energy and *verve.* The *Gerusalemme*, on the contrary, has a noble dignity, an air of refinement, a faultless beauty which are rare in literature. The *Gerusalemme* is the quintessence of art, while the *Orlando* almost throbs with the potency of genius. Considering the admirable qualities of these two great poems, it seems a little ungracious to prolong a controversy which had its origin in the spleen of Tasso's enemies. There is room in literature, and in the admiration of the wise, for both.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN AGE. THE DRAMATISTS.

In the fourth chapter some account was given of the early history of the drama, and it was shown that its most vigorous form was that of the sacred *representations*. On the revival of learning these plays were treated as non-existent, and the princes and scholars in whose hands the fate of Italian literature now lay, resolved to introduce *regular* dramatic compositions. With that object they drew upon the works of Seneca, Plautus, and Terence. Foremost in the task of restoration was Ercole I of Ferrara, who invited clever men to his court and entrusted them with the duty of translating Latin plays into the vernacular. From this the transition to original dramas composed on the same principles was easy, and we find that, in point of fact, only a year after Plautus' *Menaechmi* had been given an Italian dress, several attempts were made to vie with the classics. We may take as instances the *Cefalo* of **Niccolò da Correggio**, the *Filostrato e Panfila* and *Demetrio Re di Tebe* of **Antonio da Pistoia**, and the *Timone Misantropo* of **Boiardo**. At Ferrara also Ariosto commenced author by writing comedies, to which we shall refer later in the chapter.

The first to write a drama on the model of Sophocles was that bold, but not over successful experimenter, **Gian Giorgio**

Trissino. His *Italia Liberata* was, we have seen, a complete failure. It is due to Trissino to say that his tragedy *Sofonisba* came within an ace of success. It was designed with much judgment, there was a scrupulous regard for the unities, and the characters were happily conceived. The truth is the play was admirable in outline; where it failed was in respect to the details. Trissino had not a spark of true poetry, and his verse is exceedingly heavy and laboured. He displayed a lack of ability also in his monologues, which were intended to explain to the auditory the facts on which the drama was based.

Of Trissino's disciples the most eminent was **Giovanni Rucellai** (1475–1526). He was not only a far better poet than his master, but showed a praiseworthy independence in the selection of a subject from mediaeval history. The tale of Rosmunda, as it was less known to the generality of people, afforded greater scope for invention than the ordinary classical subjects; and considering the arbitrary laws which then governed dramatic composition, Rucellai must be allowed to have exercised great taste and discrimination in his presentment of it. The school of Trissino and Rucellai was succeeded by writers like Sperone Speroni, whose idea of tragedy was that of converting the stage into shambles. Speroni was a sort of literary dictator, who imposed on his contemporaries by sheer force of will, but who had no proper qualifications with which to support the part. Thus, when he ventured on writing a work of his own, he hedged it round with every possible precaution. The proper test of a drama ought to be its capacity for representation, but Speroni had far too much regard for his good name to submit his *Canace* to any such rude tribunal. Instead of this he recited it to an assembly of academicians, of whose

applause he was certain. This carefulness, however, did not prevent a report being spread, the existence of the work became known, and in spite of all that Speroni could do to stop it, *Canace* got into print. Finding that nothing could hinder the circulation of the play, the author delivered six lectures to the Academy in its defence, and excogitated also an apology for the benefit of generations yet to come.

Canace had full need of these measures. The story, taken from the Epistles of Ovid, is horribly revolting, and in Speroni's hands gains rather than loses in hideousness. Its distinctive features are reproduced with some additional touches in **Giraldi's** *Orbecche*, of which the scene is in Persia, and which is composed of an agreeable variety of incest, murder, and suicide. Giraldi was the writer of a long *Discorso intorno al comporre de' Romanzi, Commedie e Tragedie*, from which we should have anticipated better things from him as a dramatist. Thus in theorizing on the subject he maintained that a drama should inculcate some sublime lesson, but it is hard to see what moral we are to extract from his *Orbecche*, except that the human race is incurably depraved. Giraldi wrote, besides this, romances, novels, sonnets, tragedies, and an epic poem in honour of Ercole II, Duke of Ferrara. He nowhere, however, achieved any marked success. The most notable tragedies of the hangman order after *Canace* and *Orbecche* are the *Arciprandra* of Decio, the *Semiramide* of Manfredi, and Mondella's *Issipile*, which all appeared towards the middle of the sixteenth century. We ought perhaps to mention, though the work has little or no intrinsic merit, that Pietro Aretino, by some strange freak, composed a tragedy in which he depicted the valour of the Horatii and Curiatii, and introduced a chorus of the Virtues!

All these dramas, whatever their comparative merits, must yield to the *Torrismondo* of **Torquato Tasso.** This great poet was, as has been already observed, a man of fine scholarship and immense erudition. It is interesting therefore to learn that he thought *Oedipus Rex* the most perfect specimen of Attic tragedy. Elated by the success of his *Aminta*, which play will be noticed in its proper place, he resolved to attempt a drama for which he would take as a model the aforesaid masterpiece. In order to adhere more closely to the type in question he determined to invent the fable, and availing himself of sundry hints which he found in the history of the Goths, proceeded to complicate a plot, of which the *dénoûment* is similar to that of the *Oedipus*. *Torrismondo* must not be thought of as free from the faults of its predecessors, but it has merits which they are without. The wonderful intricacy, yet easy and natural development of the plot, the splendour of the style, and the lovely odes, which those of Sophocles himself only equal and do not excel, are sufficient to place it in a category by itself. There is indeed nothing wherewith to compare it until we come, nearly two hundred years later, to the *Merope* of Scipione Maffei.

Meanwhile the sister-art of comedy had not been neglected. It had, on the contrary, been cultivated with greater zeal and success than tragedy. Of those who distinguished themselves in this study the first in point of time was **Ariosto,** who, to please the Dukes of Ferrara, wrote two dramas, *Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*. Twenty years after their first appearance they were republished in a more perfect form, but in their original shape there can be little doubt that they are the earliest specimens of Italian comedy. Ariosto's plays, of which he wrote seven, have been esteemed by many critics

the best which this century produced, but this is hardly just. The highest place in the list must be reserved for the *Mandragola* of **Machiavelli.** The comedies of Ariosto have a strong family likeness, and in all of them the influence of Plautus and Terence is plainly discernible, though it is not so complete as to deprive them of all claims to originality. The great feature in them is the intrigue, which is treated as infinitely more important than the depicting of character. These different objects to which the drama may be dedicated subsequently led to the formation of two distinct schools, named respectively *commedia di intreccio* and *commedia di carattere.*

Something should be said also about the metre in which these plays were written—hendecasyllabic *sdrucciolo*, according to which each line consisted of five feet and terminated in two unaccented syllables. Ariosto was a great master of rhythm, but even he could not overcome the inherent faultiness of this unwieldy metre, the difficulty of which had been previously felt by Sannazaro. The adoption of this metre was followed by significant results. Despite Ariosto's reputation as the author of *Orlando Furioso*, his comedies were by no means highly esteemed, and attracted few imitators. One or two individuals, however, ventured on fresh metrical experiments. **Pecchi**, a Florentine, wrote quite a large number of plays in plain hendecasyllabic verse, but they were hopelessly dull; and **Luigi Alamanni** invented a new metre of sixteen syllables, and a *sdrucciolo*. Neither was this popular. The majority of playwrights, after the poor success of Ariosto, abandoned metre in despair and wrote prose dramas.

The first work of the sort in Italian literature was, it is considered, the *Calandra* of Cardinal **da Bibbiena,** in which

were combined elegance of style and genuine humour. Since, however, it does not differ materially from the plays already described, there is no need to particularise it further. Indeed, for the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, such productions were marked by a wearisome sameness, with one exception, the *Mandragola* of **Machiavelli**. We should gather from the prologue that the play was founded on actual occurrences within the knowledge of the spectators—a circumstance which must have added greatly to the interest of the performance. The work, however, can do without this help. The personages are drawn with striking vividness and truth, the plot is cleverly devised, and the style natural. The object of the play is to expose two kinds of pests infesting Florentine society—the parasite and the religious impostor. The chief point for which Machiavelli has been censured is his want of delicacy, but this is a fault which is common to him with the age. Even Tasso, whose morals were above reproach, will not bear to be tried by our standards of modesty. **Lasca's** comedies are only remarkable for their style, in which respect they are perfect.

This seems the most suitable place in which to refer to Pietro Aretino, who has been previously mentioned, once in connexion with his dialogues, and, secondly, in this present chapter, as having composed a tragedy. Himself illegitimate, he figured throughout his career as the apostle of obscenity and impudence, and his scurrilous, mordant speech caused him to be so much dreaded that the most powerful sovereigns of the age—Charles V, Francis I, and Clement VII—deemed it their interest to cultivate him. He was created a knight, and pensions were bestowed on him, in order to engage his silence. Pietro attempted all sorts of composition, writing even on sacred subjects, but he was most in his element

perhaps in comedy. Here he had full scope for his powers of abuse. Though some critics have detected and praised a certain liveliness in the action before unknown, it is clear that this author concentrated the best part of his attention on the dialogue, in which it would be idle to contest his success. It is distinguished by a careless ease, and smart, though shameless, epigram. The *Donna Costante* and *Amante Furioso* of **Borghini**, although they cannot be rated as very excellent compositions, deserve mention on account of their singularity. In an age when such a thing was undreamt of, they afford some foretaste of the romantic drama.

All the writers of comedy who have been cited thus far wrote in classical Italian, but comedy, which by its very nature is more popular than tragedy, assumed a municipal form, and specimens were produced in various local dialects. We may leave out of sight the Florentine, which was employed for every sort of writing, but especially for comedy, because, as has been often observed, the difference between this and literary Italian is scarcely to be perceived. In the rest of Italy the citizens of Siena were perhaps the first to write comedies in their native speech, and the works of the Accademia de' Rozzi held the same place in the estimation of their contemporaries as the Atellane plays at Rome. The Rozzi were succeeded by the Intronati, who made a speciality of comedy, and whose dramas, collected in several volumes, found their way over the Alps. It is said that Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is imitated from one of their plays, *I Ingannati*. In 1536, when Charles V passed through Siena, the Intronati regaled him with a theatrical exhibition, and a comedy was performed, which had been written by Archbishop **Alessandro Piccolomini**, and bore as title *Amore Costante*. The principal feature in this comedy is that

four different sorts of speech are in use, a captain speaking in Castilian, a Neapolitan in his own dialect, a German in broken Italian, while the common persons talk Sanese. The effect of this intermixture was naturally to increase the humour of the piece, but it is not an artifice which can be often resorted to, and **Caro** in his *Straccioni* returned to the older and better precedent by writing in ordinary Italian. If dialect is to be used at all, it is desirable in the interests of art that it should be the same throughout. This was the rule adopted in most of his comedies by **Ruzzante**, who wrote in the Paduan dialect. Lastly, as to the so-called *commedie dell' arte*, of which a good deal was improvisation. They were executed by professional actors for the diversion of the common people, whose stock of sacred representations was beginning to fail, and at first were wholly impromptu. The extravagance in which the performers indulged led to plays being, so to speak, skeletonized. The dialogue, however, was still left to the inspiration of the moment. To these farces we may trace the origin of Harlequin, Pantaloon, and other familiar friends of the pantomime.

The pastoral drama, to which we must next allude, is in a peculiar way the glory of Italy. Until a few years before *Aminta* was written, it is doubtful whether there had ever existed anything of the sort. There had been abundance of pastoral poetry, which, so far as Italy was concerned, was revived in his *Arcadia* by **Sannazzaro**, but a pastoral play was something new in literature, unless indeed a lost work of Sositheus, which Athenaeus mentions by the name of *Daphnis* or *Lityerses*, be deemed to have answered to this description. Whatever may be the truth about this, it is hardly likely that Tasso's precursors owed anything to this somewhat obscure hint. After all there is nothing so very

extraordinary in the choice of a pastoral subject for a drama, especially at a time when all kinds of experiments were being made in literature; nor is it on the score of invention so much as of unique excellence that *Aminta* awakens our admiration. Previous to its appearance several like dramas had been produced at the court of Ferrara. Thus we hear of a *Tirsi* by **Castiglione**, an *Egle* by **Giraldi**, a *Sacrifizio* by **Agostino Beccari**, and an *Aretusa* by Alberto Lollio. What, however, directly suggested to Tasso the idea of writing his *Aminta*, was the representation at which he was present in 1567 of the *Sfortunato* of **Agostino degli Argenti**, who composed it for the entertainment of Duke Alfonso II and his brother the Cardinal.

Tasso's *Aminta* is of course quite different from his *Gerusalemme*, to which it has been by some critics preferred. The former has all the simplicity and grace of the idylls of Theocritus and the eclogues of Virgil, and indeed there are not a few passages imitated from those authors. Tasso, however, like Milton, never borrowed without making full reparation by evolving in the process new and unsuspected beauties. His shepherds and shepherdesses are imagined to live in the Golden Age, before men were corrupted and set at variance by the monstrous notion of honour. These beings are equally removed from that rusticity which we might have supposed inseparable from their calling, and the false polish of the courtier. They live in plenty, and the only thing which disturbs the even tenor of their way is love. The theme of the pastoral play therefore is love—the thrice-told tale of a distressed lover and an obdurate maiden. The drama was considered a complete success, and soon began to be copied. Only one of these imitations, however, has survived—*Il Pastor Fido* of Guarini.

Giambattista Guarini (1537–1613) was a frequenter of the same court of Ferrara where Tasso resided, and they are said to have been rivals in love. Finding that Tasso's poetical effusions gave him the advantage with ladies, Guarini resolved to compete with him on his own ground. That he should have achieved such success is certainly surprising, as Guarini was a person of very aristocratic sentiments, and shrank from the description of poet as though it derogated from his character as a gentleman. *Il Pastor Fido* bears some resemblance to *Aminta*, but in the main action they are entirely distinct, and of the two the former has by far the more complicated and ambitious design. Italy was now dominated by Spain, and the influence of the conquerors made itself felt even in literature, which was marked by numerous vices. Thus in *Il Pastor Fido* the comic element is introduced in such a way as somewhat to impair the value of the piece as a work of art. Out of regard for this feature in the play Guarini styled it a *tragicommedia*. In the prevailing state of public feeling, however, its very inconsistencies were pleasing. The better sense of Italy, whilst acknowledging the merits of *Il Pastor Fido*—its rich poetry, warm feeling, and life-like pourtrayal of character—and conceding to it the second place, has always ranked it at a considerable interval after *Aminta*.

It may not perhaps strictly belong to our province to discuss the melodrama, the *libretto* of which is often a mere accessory, but *Daphne*, a pastoral written by **Ottavio Rinuccini**, has an interest independent of the music, and deserves a passing notice. There were many other plays produced at this time, some of which have fallen into unmerited oblivion, but it is necessary that we should pass on

to the subject of lyric poetry, to which similar remarks will be applicable.

The sixteenth century was an age in which every gentleman was expected, as a matter of course, to be able to indite a sonnet. Nay, poetry descended into the street; artisans felt the breath of Apollo, and forsaking the popular rhymes, became followers of Petrarch. The entire peninsula swarmed with Petrarchists and Boccaccists, especially the former, whose mannerisms and cold conceits were in vain attacked by **Muzio** in his *Arte Poetica*, and by **Niccolò Franco** in *Il Petrarchista*. While there are no really great names in this army of love-sick singers, there are several which are of secondary importance, and which would not be rightly passed over. Thus **Cardinal Bembo** (1470–1547) has gained some distinction by his imitations of Petrarch, although he is very far from attaining the perfection of his model. The reason lay primarily, no doubt, in the disparity of their powers, but the motives which impelled Petrarch to write were real, whereas in the case of Bembo, a cloyed sensualist, they were imaginary only. The Cardinal composed also grammatical works, and, although not even a Tuscan, was regarded by the Florentines as an authority from whom there was no appeal.

Another poet who deserves to be singled out from the multitude of rhymesters is **Galeazzo di Tarsia** (1492–1555), who was not much esteemed during his lifetime, and only leapt into fame after his death on the publication of his sonnets. He was one of the many admirers of Vittoria Colonna, in whose honour most of his lyrics were written. They are of a different quality from those of Bembo, but Galeazzo had not the necessary strength of mind to break with the fashions of the age. It being considered a positive merit to rifle Petrarch's *Canzoniere* of its gems, Galeazzo

sacrificed at the altar of convention, and is now well-nigh forgotten. The same cannot be said of his divinity, **Vittoria Colonna** (1490–1547), although for the purpose of immortalising her name her sex was probably no disservice to her. Most of her verse is dedicated to her husband, the Marchese di Pescara. It is distinguished both by warmth and elegance, but even it is tainted in some measure by stereotyped affected phraseology. After the death of her husband she withdrew from society and composed religious poems. One canzonet which has been usually attributed to Vittoria, though some have given it to Ariosto, rises high above the level of the sixteenth century, and is in its way unique.

Vittoria is remembered also as the only woman, so far as is known, who succeeded in captivating Michelangelo. That great man was generally too much occupied with the ideal world to take an interest in sublunary objects, but his habit of abstraction broke down before the charms of the poetess. Before he knew her, he said, drawing a metaphor from art, he was a half-finished statue to which the chisel of Vittoria gave form. One result of their intimacy was that **Michelangelo** (1475–1564) turned poet, and although he could not avoid being a Petrarchist, his verse has a stately nobility, an intellectual grace, denied to the professional rhymesters. Berni, who felt a great contempt for the class, passed the remark on them that *they* said *words*, Michelangelo *things*.

It must not be supposed that Vittoria Colonna was the only poetess of the age. On the contrary there was quite a host of ladies ambitious of the name, of whom we may quote as examples **Veronica Gambara**, **Tullia d'Aragona**, **Gaspara Stampa**, **Laura Terracina**, and **Tarquinia Molza**. In point of merit there is perhaps not much to choose between them, but if any claims special notice it is **Gaspara Stampa** (1523–

1554). She was very romantic, and her poems are naturally divided by the three periods to which they relate. The first belong to the time when she fell in love with a young nobleman, Collatino di Collalto. He appears to have possessed every qualification which could be demanded of a lover, being well-born, rich and virtuous; and Gaspara is rapturous over him. Then came dark days of suspicion and suspense, which form the second period, and finally, when her hero was wedded to another, the third period of despairing certainty. Her verse is real poetry, and if she had not been so unlucky as to be born in that age of formal lyricism, it is possible that she might have won the name of a second Sappho.

The sonnets of **Giovanni del Casa** are striking for their masculine vigour, and were greatly admired by Ugo Foscolo. Tasso also wrote lyrical verses, of which those that relate to his unhappy love affair are the most pathetic. In one sense he may be claimed as a disciple of Guido Guinicelli, since he treats of Platonic love, but he is as superior to the Bolognese in depth of learning as in mastery of poetic form.

Already mention has been made of **Berni** and the poetry called after him bernesque. The name which he gave to his poems was *Capitoli*, and they were written in triplets. As may be readily imagined he had a crowd of imitators, most of whom were only feeble echoes of their master. Now the most salient feature in bernesque poetry is the ambiguity of the terms, *double entendre.* For the success of this artifice there ought to be an exact correspondence between the literal and the figurative meaning, but this we often do not find in the works of the minor exponents of the art, e.g. **Giovanni Mauro.** After Berni himself, the chief writers of frivolous verse were Lasca and Caporali. The former was here quite in his element, and his *madrigalesse* (a species of

composition of his own invention, in which he parodied the madrigal-writers) are among the quaintest things in literature. Caporali, for his part, attempted an innovation by choosing such subjects as lent themselves to satire. His longest work is a *Vita di Mecenate*, in which the jest turns on a modernisation, as it were, of the worthy patron of Horace. Another poem of Caporali, entitled *Viaggio al Parnaso*, is said to have supplied Cervantes with the hint for his better known work of the same name. As a general criticism of bernesque poetry it may be observed that it is often very exquisite as regards its form, but its aim is entirely nugatory, wherefore its professors cannot be placed high in the hierarchy of poets.

About this time satire of a more serious kind, imitated from Horace and Juvenal, began to be cultivated. The first specimens of the kind were those of **Vinciguerra** (1480). They are stated to have been so popular that at Venice there was not a person who did not know them by heart. This is difficult to credit, as for us Vinciguerra's satires possess few literary attractions, and are, in fact, little more than rambling discourses of miscellaneous scolding. **Ariosto** also attempted this style. The satires of that great poet are quite worthy of his fame. Written in a graceful and easy vein, they are lit up every now and then by unlooked-for sallies, full of wit, and are as pungent as satire need ever be. Next to Ariosto, among the satirists of the age, is **Ercole Bentivoglio** (1506–1572), but his affectation is intolerable. He served during the siege of Florence as a mercenary of Clement VII, and in anything but the spirit of a soldier repines at the vinegar and mouldy brown bread which are his daily fare. Son of one of the many petty despots who were the plague and disgrace of Italy, he was naturally obtuse to the character of the scene

which was enacting before his eyes—the destruction of the last bulwark of liberty in fair Florence. Other satirists were **Luigi Alamanni**, **Pietro Nelli**, **Girolamo Fenaruolo**, and **Simeoni**.

Lastly as to didactic poetry, of which the age affords some examples. **Rucellai** wrote an admirable poem about bees, suggested doubtless by a famous passage in the Georgics. He was followed by **Luigi Alamanni** with his *Coltivazione*, an exhaustive treatise on agriculture, and a non-Florentine writer **Bernardino Baldi**, whose encyclopaedic mind furnished forth the subject-matter of a poem entitled *Nautica*. All these works are in blank verse, and on the whole extremely tiresome. Better in every way are two poems of **Tansillo**, his *Podere* and *Balia*, which are written in *terza rima*, and have, if no other, these merits—they are not long and they are readable.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARINISTS AND ARCADIANS.

The seventeenth century as an era is famous for the progress of natural science, to which Italy contributed her full share. Galileo, Renieri, Cassini, Torricelli, Valisnieri, Viviani, Bellini, Redi, and a host of others, are still remembered as participating in this great movement, but to the historian of Italian letters the interest which these names excite is incidental only. In pure literature the age was one of decadence and decline; and the reason is obvious. The peninsula groaned under the oppressions of a number of paltry tyrants, who could not afford to tolerate any works with a bearing on morals or politics. On the other hand it could do them no harm, rather much good, to encourage acute and industrious minds to search into the mysteries of nature. They would not only be earning an honourable name for themselves as patrons of learning, but would be keeping pragmatical persons out of mischief. Whatever their motives may have been, the sons and successors of Cosimo de' Medici were devoted to this study, and attended in person the discussions of the Accademia del Cimento, which was an institution especially dedicated to physical science.

Literature was vitiated by two principal faults—far-fetched analogy and an excessive love of antithesis. As instances of the former may be quoted such circumlocutions as *ardenti*

zecchini della banca del cielo ('glowing zecchins of the bank of the sky'), *buchi lucenti del celeste cribro* ('shining holes of the heavenly sieve'), and *luminose agnelle* ('bright lambkins') for the stars. It would be easy to multiply such expressions which in England we should term euphuisms, and which, with judicious editing, might furnish materials for an agreeable jest-book. These faults do not cling quite exclusively to the seventeenth century. For similar abuses Tasso had already rebuked a grandson of Ariosto, but then offences of the sort were rare. The extravagance reached its culminating point in the writings of **Giambattista Marini** (1569–1625) and his followers. Marini was extremely popular, and to judge from his earliest attempts, deliberately forsook truer perceptions of art for a set of corrupt maxims as more in harmony with the tendencies of the age. His chief work is an epic, *Adone*, for which he was munificently rewarded by the King of France with a pension of a thousand *écus* and the title of *cavaliere*. There is not much in *Adone* that we can properly call new, and his choice of this subject seems to have been dictated by a two-fold consideration—the opportunity it afforded him for licence and his rare talent for description. One feature in the poem which is especially disfiguring to it is the troop of allegorical and abstract personages who help to fill up the canvas. We have noted some specimens of impossible metaphors; Marini shall supply us with an example of strained antithesis. He speaks of Love:

> *Lince privo di lume, Argo bendato,*
> *Vecchio lattante e pargoletto antico,*
> *Ignorante erudito, ignudo armato,* etc.

('Lynx reft of light, a blindfold Argus, suckling old man and aged little boy, ignorant yet learned, naked yet armed.')

This is monstrous enough, but Marini was completely eclipsed by his two followers **Girolamo Preti** (†1626) and **Claudio Achillini** (1574–1640), who ran riot in such conceits, so that the metaphors of the seventeenth century have passed into a proverb. But the writers of that age were not all of them Marinists. There were two other classes, both of which were agreed in reprobating the prevailing vices, but of which the one sought to cure, while the other was content to mock at them. The chief representative of the former is **Gabriello Chiabrera** (1552–1637). He was a man of great learning, and particularly in love with Greek poetry, the graces whereof he endeavoured to transplant into Italian. He likens the enterprise to that of Columbus in search of a new world, but such phrases are much too grandiloquent for the attempt. All that Chiabrera really did was to dethrone Petrarch, who had been the idol of the poetasters of the sixteenth century, and to set up Pindar and Anacreon instead. The book of Nature, with its endless suggestions, remained to him sealed. Not only did Chiabrera lay violent hands on the words and phrases of his masters, but he also appropriated their themes, substituting however for the contests of Olympia the games of football at Florence. In formulating these odes Chiabrera ventured on an innovation by the use of compound terms, e. g. *nubicalpestatore*. Such combinations are agreeable to the genius of the northern languages of Europe, as they were to the ancient Greek, from which of course Chiabrera copied them, but Latin and its derivatives somehow do not take kindly to them. Chiabrera is more happy when he celebrates the triumphs of Italian galleys over the Turks and corsairs who swarmed in the Mediterranean. The subject was naturally one to kindle his patriotic ardour, and in handling it he displays considerable skill and

some amount of real passion. Even here, however, he does not let go the leading-strings of Pindar.

Chiabrera was greatly admired in his own day, and was regarded as a touch-stone of good sense. It was said by Cardinal Pallavicini that, 'in order to find out whether a man had good talents, it was needful to see if Chiabrera pleased him.' Under these circumstances he was certain to have many disciples, some of whom did him small credit. Among the more famous may be mentioned **Guidi, Testi, Ciampoli, Menzini** and **Filicaja.**

In the case both of Ciampoli and Guidi their character seems to have taken a ply from their writings. Ciampoli was so vain that he did not return people's salutes, while Guidi, with lofty self-assertion, challenged a comparison with Pindar. '*Non è caro agli Dei Pindaro solo*' are his words. Of the two **Guidi** (1650–1712) is certainly the more significant. Misinterpreting a phrase of Horace in which he spoke of the verses of the Theban poet as freed from all law, Guidi spoilt the framework of the Italian canzonet and wrote with studied carelessness. In this he had, fortunately, no imitators. As a writer Guidi belongs partly to the school of Marini, partly to the Arcadians. He collaborated with Queen Christina of Sweden, who suggested to him the drama *Endimione* and wrote some verses for it. Towards the end of his life he purposed translating the Psalms, but finding, as he said, the genius of Hebrew opposed to that of Italian poetry, he abandoned the experiment. He did, however, work out a metrical version of six Latin homilies by Clement XI.

Testi's (1593–1646) style is more refined and chaste than that of Guidi, and much of his poetry is undeniably beautiful —notably the allegorical *Ruscelletto Orgoglioso*, the source of

all his woe. His verse, however, lacks energy. The best in regard to purity and propriety of language is **Menzini** (1646–1704), who, conscious of his limitations, wrote by preference on rural subjects. Some of his sonnets retain their popularity to this day. It still remains to allude to one of Chiabrera's scholars—**Filicaja** (1632–1707), who, in his moments of inspiration, far surpassed his contemporaries. None of these writers, it seems, could escape the besetting sin, the odd metaphors and reckless exaggeration, of the time, but in his poems relating to the siege of Vienna by the Turks Filicaja may be said to have risen to the height of the argument. The occasion was one which seemed laden with consequences to the Christian faith, and Filicaja, a Florentine gentleman, was unfeignedly and profoundly religious. The principal blemish in his verse is its rhetorical turn, but in reading him everyone must feel that Filicaja is a real poet.

It is evident that the artifices of the Marinists were such as lent themselves very readily to satire, and, as has been already intimated, a school of satirists arose. They must be judged—the best of them, at least—to have obtained a considerable measure of success, for the writings of **Menzini**, **Salvatore Rosa**, and **Adimari**, even now, have not ceased to be read. The works of Monsignore **Sergardi**, who wrote under the name of Settano, made a great stir, but there was too much of personal invective in them, the chief object of attack being Gravina. Sergardi, therefore, can hardly be accepted as a candidate for the primacy which, according to the taste of the critic, ought to be assigned either to Benedetto Menzini or **Salvatore Rosa** (1615–1676). The former has the surer touch, writes better verses, and shows himself in all the details of style more of an adept in the art. Rosa,

on the other hand, has a fund of rude vigour, but seems, notwithstanding his skill in painting, to have had little feeling for the niceties of language. He is an amateur in satire. This writer was extremely ostentatious of his learning, and his satires may be regarded, from one point of view, as a medley of Greek and Latin proper names. Still more regrettable is his cruel and shameless attack on the great Michelangelo.

Finally must be mentioned **Francesco Redi** (1629–1697), who gained distinction both in the field of science and of letters. His lyrical poems are now forgotten or remembered only by philologers for their pure diction. Redi's dithyramb, however—*Baccho in Toscana*—has experienced a better fate. It is looked upon not only as a perfect example of its sort, but, literally, as unrivalled. The history of the dithyramb previously may be briefly stated as follows. Italy had possessed specimens of the kind ever since the days of Poliziano. When, later on, Chiabrera made it his mission to introduce the various forms of Greek poetry, he naturally paid attention to the dithyramb. He would appear, however, to have been unprovided with models, and thus to have hazarded a guess at the nature of such compositions. His conjecture was false, but Redi followed in his footsteps and celebrated the wines of Tuscany in his *Baccho*, through the spokesmanship of the god himself. The poem, according to the author's intention, mimics the phases of a drunken fit, and becomes more wild as it proceeds. To produce this effect a variety of metres are employed, and the most plausible terms; but it is impossible to disguise the fact that *Baccho in Toscana* is the lucubration of a scholar, not a work inspired by a familiarity like that of the vine-dresser or vintner, or even of the professional diner-out.

The drama was even in a worse way than lyric poetry. True comedy had succumbed to the *Commedia dell' arte*, and the only works of a dramatic nature which are still remembered are *La Tancia* and *La Fiera* of **Michelangelo Buonarroti** the younger. These writings are of a character entirely distinct. *La Fiera* was composed without any reference to the theatre, and consists of five *Giornate*. Each of these *Giornate* again is divided into five long acts. There are likewise five prologues or interludes, in which allegorical personages such as Art, Merchandise, Commerce, Enjoyment and Profit appear; while in the main body of the work are introduced people of every age, sex, and condition, an aggrègate of humanity for which there is only one description —menagerie. *La Tancia* on the other hand is copied from the rustic plays of the fourteenth century, and is interesting. Buonarroti, though he had no real dramatic talent, paints in lively colours the habits of Florentine country-folk, whom he makes speak in their native brogue.

As a supposed prototype of *Paradise Lost* it is permissible to allude to the *Adamo* of Andreini—a whimsical composition, but not quite devoid of merit.

The greatest name in Italian literature during the seventeenth century is unquestionably that of **Tassoni** (1565–1635). His masterpiece, *La Secchia Rapita*, is a poem of European reputation. In order to grasp its significance, it must be borne in mind that the age was fruitful in epic poems, although none is of sufficient dignity or importance to merit distinct mention in these pages. *Gerusalemme Liberata*, like Ariosto's *Orlando*, provoked feelings of emulation in the breasts of unnumbered minor poets, who vainly strove to achieve a similar renown. Not that they were all alike or all bad. Some of them possessed great talent, and even

genius, but it is a common observation that epic poems cannot be produced at will. They are the work not only of men, but of times and conditions. Ariosto and Tasso had a *clientèle* in the people, who were superstitious by inheritance, and in whose store of marvels they had found unlimited materials. Critics like Cardinal d'Este might disdain their compositions, but such cavils were drowned in the enthusiastic applause of the multitude. The succeeding age was almost wholly critical and analytical, and even a little cynical. It is evidence of the altered tone that the *Aeneid* of Virgil, who during the middle ages had been reverenced as a saint and feared as a magician, was travestied with impunity by Lalli.

As for Tassoni, he was a man with an instinctive love of freedom, a noble contempt for everything servile and cringing no less in literature than in politics. Unluckily neither his own circumstances nor those of the time favoured his aspirations. He came of an ancient family, but was forced by poverty to dance attendance on Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, while Italy, which he would gladly have seen strong and united, gasped at the feet of Spain. When the Duke of Savoy, with fine courage, attacked the colossal monarchy, Tassoni wrote some spirited *Filippiche*, exposing the weakness of their common foe to the princes of Italy and urging them to support Carlo Emanuele. The duke was at first duly grateful, but by-and-by there came a suspension of arms, and in the end Tassoni was sacrificed to political necessities, none of the ample promises which had been made to him being redeemed.

In literature Tassoni manifested his independence by objecting to the tyranny of the Dellacruscan Vocabulary, whereby the use of any terms not consecrated by the usage

of a few writers was forbidden. This is strikingly evident in his book, *Pensieri*, which, for the rest, his admirers have strong reason to regret. If there is some gold in it, there is much alloy. Often, strangely juxtaposed with a profound truth, is to be found some absurd paradox, and, generally, it is a standing proof of the inequality of genius, the more impressive because Tassoni frequently showed himself an acute critic. A poetical commonplace at this time was the discovery of the New World. This subject had been already treated by **Stigliani**, **Villafranchi**, and others, and when a friend submitted to him several cantos of an epic on the well-worn theme, Tassoni in words of the sagest counsel dissuaded him from the attempt. He himself at one period projected a poem *Oceana* on the same topic, and advanced a theory that a composition of this nature, if it was to succeed, should be modelled on the *Odyssey*, not, as was ordinarily the case, on the *Aeneid* or *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Tassoni completed one canto, but here his heart failed him or, as is more likely, he became sensible that his gifts would be better employed in another direction. By a curious coincidence, at the very time when Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*, Tassoni set to work on a satirico-epic poem, to which he gave the name *La Secchia Rapita*, and which, it may be remarked, was printed several years before Marini's *Adone*.

Consistently with his design Tassoni rigidly adhered to the forms of the heroic epic, producing by this means a more laughable result. From a historical point of view *La Secchia Rapita* connects with an earlier period of Italian annals, when two states, on the least provocation, rushed into exacerbated war. It would have been more to the purpose perhaps, if, instead of lashing the redundant energy of the old republicans, Tassoni had attacked the opposite vice as

exemplified in his contemporaries. But this does not by any means exhaust his quiver. One of the worst features in the literature of the day was the rank abuse of pagan mythology, which had, so to speak, been galvanized into life. It symbolized nothing, and its revival was due to the prostitution of poetry in the petty Italian courts. By assailing this foolish conventionality Tassoni antedated, in some sense, the efforts put forth two centuries later by the romanticists for a more natural style of writing.

From the moment of its publication *La Secchia Rapita* was greatly admired, and it was translated into several foreign languages, but it did not effect the desired reform. The truth is it was not taken seriously. It was regarded as a light amusing composition, not as a satire. The same task was attempted, with rather more austerity, by **Bracciolini** in his *Scherno dei Dei*. His work is well written, but might not perhaps have been remembered, had not a contest arisen between the two authors respecting the priority of their works. *La Secchia Rapita* is deformed by none of the vices of the period. The style is bold and the versification easy. It might have been improved by the insertion of a few more episodes. As it is, the description of so many battles is apt at last to grow tedious. In spite of that the poem is not of the sort which, once read, can be indifferently laid aside. The flavour it leaves behind constantly invites to a fresh perusal. Of the many imitations of Tassoni the only epic worthy of mention is the *Malmantile* of **Lorenzo Lippi** (1606–1664), written in the gayest of moods.

The prose of the seventeenth century is much on a par with its poetry. The orators, especially the preachers, indulged in the wildest excesses of rhetoric. If any is to be excepted it must be Segneri, who has many admirable

qualities, but nothing to compare with the consummate art of Demosthenes or the fervid eloquence of Chatham. The academic readings are inferior even to those of the sixteenth century, which, though not brilliant, had at least the merit of a pure style. Historical literature on the other hand is illustrated by some famous names, the most notable being those of **Arrigo Caterino Davila, Guido Bentivoglio**, Fra **Paolo Sarpi**, and Cardinal **Pallavicini. Davila** (1576–1631) described the civil wars of France, whilst **Bentivoglio** (1579–1603) dealt with those of Flanders. Both works are distinguished by dignity of manner and great knowledge of affairs. They excited, however, less interest than the other pair of histories devoted to the Council of Trent. That by **Sarpi** (1552–1623) is the better known as it is certainly the more deserving. The writer shows marked ability in arranging his facts, but even more striking is Sarpi's independence of thought, which he expressed at the risk of torture and assassination.

Sarpi was a Venetian; and it is probable that his dislike of Rome was intensified and inflamed by the interposition of Paul V in the affairs of his native city, which in 1606 was laid under an interdict. The *History of the Council of Trent*, however, was not the product of malevolence, but a dream of Sarpi's youth, and its consummation, late in his career, gave its author a place in the first rank of the world's historians. It was published in 1619 at London, and announced as the work of Pietro Soave Polano, a sort of anagram formed on the writer's actual name—Paolo Sarpi.

The weak point in the book is the style, which lacks finish. In this the author must certainly yield the palm to **Pallavicini** (1607–1667). On the other hand the Cardinal is by no means Sarpi's equal in his mode of discussing the subject. Sarpi is an impartial historian, but Pallavicini writes

as an apologist—an attitude which diminishes our confidence in his statements. In this department two other names may be mentioned, Daniello Bartoli and Giambattista Doni, but their works are not specially significant.

The literary vices of the seventeenth century were so pronounced that they could not remain hid even from those who were most affected by them. They openly challenged reform. The consequence was that a reaction set in, and writers lapsed into the very opposite errors. Instead of being a mania, a perpetual convulsion, literature became languid and tame. This result was mainly brought about by a single academy. During the last ten years of the century it was the custom of various scholars living at Rome to repair to one of the pleasant hills in the neighbourhood and there to read sonnets, canzonets, elegies, epigrams, etc., their own compositions, for their own or their mutual delectation. One day, in the exultation of his heart, a member of the brotherhood exclaimed *Ecco per noi risorta Arcadia* ('See for us Arcadia risen again')—words which led to the formation of an academy bearing the name 'Arcadia.' The mission which it undertook was the propagation of poetical orthodoxy, and including its branches, it soon numbered one thousand three hundred adherents. Enrolled in the list were all sorts and conditions of literary men—**Guidi** and **Ciampoli**, Pindarists, as well as **Crescimbeni** and **Leonio**, who were disciples of Theocritus.

Probably it was this circumstance which caused the Arcadians to adopt a kind of *via media* in the reforms prescribed by them. They chose as a model the verse of **Angiolo di Costanzo**, already mentioned as among the writers of the sixteenth century. Filicaja, in one of his sonnets, predicts something like an eternal duration for the Arcadia, but the

institution lacked an essential element of success. The members, generally speaking, were by no means men of genius, and to-day it is difficult to recall as many as three or four names representing merely respectable talent. One of the most eminent of the set is **Francesco Lemene** (1634–1704), who graduated in the school of Marini and Achillini, but he burned to achieve something original, and when the new academy proclaimed war on bad taste, became a prolific writer of Arcadian verse. Lemene, however, filled with scorn at the mean and pitiful style of his fellow-shepherds, desired for himself the reputation of a man of spirit. This attempt to combine antagonistic qualities renders his poetry most affected. Hardly any writings have so false a ring. He considered himself a master of frivolous verse, and wrote in his old age a volume of sacred compositions, in which he attempted to be sublime, but fell far short of his intention.

A writer of much greater merit is **Giambattista Zappi** (1667–1719). Zappi was a precocious genius. Before he was thirteen years old he had taken his degree both in philosophy and jurisprudence. He chose the law as his profession, and at Rome, where he resided, held several public offices. Of all the 'shepherds' Zappi is the least open to censure. His poems are very harmonious, and, being of a really poetic nature, he might in better times have made for himself a great name. He wrote in both styles, the simple and sublime, and specimens of his verse still find a place in every Italian anthology.

We reach the next stage in the development of Arcadian poetry in a kind of writing named by its authors 'fantastic.' The term must not be understood in the modern sense, but, suitably to its derivation, as synonymous with 'figurative' or 'ornate.' The leader in this new departure was **Carlo In-**

nocenzo **Frugoni** (1692–1768), who was blest with a copious imagination, but lacked seriousness. He wrote an immense number of poems of every sort, in every conceivable style and metre, and for our purpose may be deemed the last of the Arcadians.

Between the death of Zappi and that of Frugoni a period elapsed of nearly forty years, during which thousands of versifiers won a temporary fame. Very few names, however, have descended to our times—none glorious. Before literature could arise from the mire in which it was sunk, the action of a keen unsparing criticism was necessary. Already this had been begun by **Tassoni,** who at eighteen wrote a tragedy to which he appended a critique instancing with remarkable frankness both its merits and defects. Tassoni was the author also of a treatise on Petrarch's verse, which is signalized by his characteristic freedom. The Considerations, as he called them, are couched in a sufficiently lively style, and often display much judgment. Elsewhere, however, he is the victim of his own caprice, which leads him into unfairness and exaggeration. Allowing for this, Tassoni's ideas are vastly superior to those of his age. Among his successors four attained to great eminence, Gianvincenzo Gravina, Apostolo Zeno, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, and Scipione Maffei.

Gravina (1664–1718), a man of immense erudition, who treated learnedly of Roman Law, sought to win for himself a place also in pure literature. He composed several dramas in the manner of the ancients, and such was his unconscionable opinion of himself that he pretended to an equality with Sophocles. As an original writer he must be pronounced an unqualified failure, but his ill-success is redeemed in some measure by the excellence of his criticism. His discourse on Guidi's *Endimione*, which was his first attempt of the

kind, though it contains many sound remarks, suffers from its egregious style in which he seeks to outvie Guidi himself, the most ambitious of the Pindarists. Gravina's other work, *Della Ragione Poetica*, on the contrary, is esteemed the best treatise on aesthetics ever produced in Italy. Some of its propositions may no longer be deemed tenable, but, taken as a whole, it is a noble study, and well adapted to the purpose of regenerating literature.

Zeno (1669–1750) is in this connexion chiefly famous for the part which he took in publishing the *Giornale de' Letterati*, the best Italian periodical of the last century. He was by all accounts a wonderful man. Without a touch of literary jealousy, he did all in his power to assist merit wherever it might be found, and his letters testify as much to his kindness of heart as to his learning and critical acumen. Zeno is remembered also for his notes on the *Eloquenza Italiana* of **Fontanini**. The latter was an insane fanatic who, to swell the volume of the *Index Expurgatorius*, took the short way of denouncing the works of all writers, whether living or dead, as heretical. Among his other projects Zeno intended writing an exhaustive account of Italian historians, but having heard that **Muratori** (1672–1750) was engaged on a similar work, generously made over to him the whole of his materials.

The work which Muratori undertook was one to tax the energies of a whole phalanx of scholars. A thorough inventory had been made of the Italian libraries, and a vast number of forgotten books had been exhumed. These had been again published, and the time was now come for a new critical history of the entire literature. Considering the Herculean nature of the task, it is with no small astonishment that we read that Muratori's *magnum opus*, his *Annali d'Italia*, occupied him only eighteen months in writing.

This despatch was purchased at no cost of accuracy, nor was Muratori dissuaded by his saintliness of character and catholic orthodoxy from pourtraying in their true colours the injuries which Italy had sustained through the temporal power of the Popes. It would be demanding, perhaps, too much of human nature to expect from Muratori, in addition to these virtues, the glory of a perfect style, which he has not, but in his grasp of general principles he is in no way inferior either to Tassoni or Zeno. Take for instance his essays *Buono Gusto* and *Perfetta Poesia*, which are both full of instruction.

Scipione Maffei (1675–1755), though not equal to Muratori as a philosopher, may vie with him in depth of learning and longanimity of research. Maffei was no mere critic or compiler. He felt a warm interest in the drama, which he desired to see reformed on the model of the French theatre, then regarded as the most effective in Europe. He made a collection of all the most valuable Italian dramatic works, and engaged in a controversy with Frate Concina on the morality of the theatre. This discussion drew attention to a play which Maffei had written, entitled *Merope*. It was translated into various foreign languages and was everywhere received with the loudest plaudits. It was at this time that **Francesco Bianchini** broke new ground, so far as Italy was concerned, by writing a *Storia Universale*, which he found too immense to complete, and—a still more notable undertaking—**Giambattista Vico** (1668–1744), in his *Scienza Nuova*, composed the first philosophy of history since Aristotle. Vico's influence on European thought is clearly marked, in Comte and Michelet, for instance. He anticipated Wolf in his treatment of the Homeric problem, and Niebuhr in his attitude towards early Roman history.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FORERUNNERS OF THE REVOLUTION.

WHILST Arcadian poetry was at the height of its popularity there appeared at Rome a youthful prodigy in the person of **Pietro Trapassi** (1698–1782), who delighted the literary circles by his easy and graceful improvisation. Gravina, happening to hear him and struck by his genius, adopted him. In allusion to this circumstance Trapassi altered his name to Metastasio, from a Greek word signifying 'removal.' This at least is the general account; but it seems not unlikely, on a comparison of the two names, that the one is a translation of the other, just as Melanchthon is of Schwarzerd. Gravina, fully appreciating the boy's capacities and wishing him to make a name in literature, induced him to abstain from improvising and devote himself to the classics; and, at his death, left him a considerable fortune. Metastasio, however, quickly spent it all and was reduced to the utmost straits. After a time, by a stroke of good luck, he was commissioned to write a musical drama. This, it was understood, was to be exhibited as a birthday honour for the consort of the Emperor Charles VI. Stimulated by these motives Metastasio composed his *Orti Esperidi*, which immediately gave him a place in the front rank of Italian authors. Marianna Bulgarelli, a famous *prima donna*, had taken the part of Venus

in the piece, and was impressed with the notion that the words which she sang were real poetry—noble, passionate, and melodious. She accordingly applied for an introduction to the writer. Metastasio became a frequent visitor at her house and there met a celebrated musician, Porpora, who offered to teach him his own art. Metastasio proved an apt pupil, and, having obtained an insight into the principles of music as well as those of verse, was able to turn his knowledge to account in melodramatic composition. He effected, indeed, a perfect equipoise between the two arts, whereas previously the melodrama had been almost entirely musical and spectacular, the verse merely serving as a frame.

Tragedy being at a low ebb and comedy debased, throughout the seventeenth century the musical drama was constantly growing in attractiveness; but although there were produced countless melodramatic works from the time of Rinuccini to that of Metastasio it does not appear that the latter was much a debtor to any of them. A reservation must be made, however, in favour of one author—Apostolo Zeno, already alluded to as one of the most celebrated critics of the eighteenth century. He had also some reputation as a poet, and was retained in that capacity for the theatres of his Imperial Majesty. Zeno, with his ideas, could not comply with the prevailing taste, and he made a strenuous effort to reconcile the melodrama with reason, to describe real passions, to write poetry. Although his dramas mark a great advance on those of his predecessors, still they cannot be termed in any sense masterpieces. To Metastasio, however, who succeeded Zeno in his office as Court-poet, they served as a signpost pointing out in what direction excellence might be attained.

As a young man Metastasio wrote a tragedy entitled

Giustino, of which the subject was taken from Trissino's *Italia Liberata*. There is in this play hardly anything suggestive of the writer's destined triumphs, the metre being the languid hendecasyllabics of Trissino's poem; while, to add to its faults, it is touched with the frigidity and formalism of Gravina's tragedies. One thing, however, may be noted in it—it ends happily. It is said that Zeno, the first to adopt this artifice, did so at the request of Charles VI, who wished the audience to leave in a good humour. But Metastasio, before seeing the principle reduced to practice in Zeno's works, had heard something to a similar effect from Gravina, who observed in the case of Aeschylus that, instead of bringing the supposed horrors visibly before the spectators, he intentionally caused them to be reported.

In order to judge Metastasio fairly it must be remembered that he laboured under severe limitations. He had to consider not only the requirements of the drama proper, but those of music. So many female voices must be provided, for, such-and-such a scene must end with a duet, etc., etc. Writing under these conditions it is almost impossible that Metastasio should have done much better. He succeeded in producing plays which might be exhibited without music—works of art. In one sense there is too much art in them, Metastasio being more in love with the beautiful in nature than the true. The result is a certain dull uniformity in the personages, their modes of thinking and acting; nor in other ways can Metastasio evade the charge of being mannered. He is accused of possessing but a limited vocabulary and, although no language is so rich in harmonies as Italian, of choosing only one key and cleaving to it. There is some foundation for these charges; but those who make them appear to forget the peculiar character of the melodrama—its

association with music, which was bound to have a modifying influence both on the rhythms and the diction.

The only other writer of first-rate importance during this period is Goldoni. Before anything can be said of him, however, it will be necessary to take up the subject of comic literature at the point where it was dropped, and describe the phases it passed through, until finally it came into Goldoni's hands. The reader will remember what was said in a previous chapter as to the slavish following of things Spanish. In the seventeenth century that country gave birth to a famous writer, Lope de Vega, who, adhering to the popular type of the drama, the mystery, produced a very large number of plays composed in that style. As we have already shown, sacred representations had once been the fashion in Italy, but were driven out more than a century before by the operation of the critical spirit. Lope's works therefore had all the charm of novelty for the Italians, who eagerly imitated their peculiarities, among which were included quaint conceits, grotesque characters, false situations and affected passion.

The most notable representatives of this school were **Jacopo Cicognini** and his son **Andrea Giacinto**, who flourished during the first half of the seventeenth century. The former in his early manhood had been guided by the better traditions of the native drama; it was only in his old age that he commenced to ape the mannerisms of Lope de Vega. The younger Cicognini essayed the same thing, and his attempts were more fortunate. With a diction less pure than Jacopo's he succeeded, to a much greater extent, in catching the spirit of his master—was bold, animated, emphatic. Indeed, it is evident, and cannot be denied, that, amidst the confusion inflicted on the world of letters by the social and political changes of the seventeenth century,

comedy in one particular was improved. Amorous intrigues were no longer the only stuff treated of by the comic writer. Moreover Cicognini is most prolific in accidents, and manipulates them with such address as to keep the reader in suspense to the close of the play.

Meanwhile a new school arose, which sought to vie with the French *dramaturges*. Molière had many followers, of whom **Girolamo Gigli** deserves particular mention. Gigli was the author of a play, *Don Pirlone*, based on *Tartuffe*, but written with so much ability that the imitation was effectually concealed, and the piece was regarded, fairly, as original. Gigli, however, though a keen, pungent writer, produced but few works, and therefore did not effect that alteration in the taste of his countrymen which might otherwise have been expected from him.

Far more abundant are the plays of **Fagiuoli**, a Florentine (1660–1742), and **Pietro Chiari** (d. 1785), a Modenese, both dramatists *par métier*. Neither of them possessed a spark of genius. Fagiuoli, like his French models, affected a classical regularity in the form of his dramas, but in disposing his incidents betrays great feebleness, and any attempt at dramatic intrigue lands him in evident difficulty. His diction is generally more graceful and pure than that of the Cicognini school, but he falls into one mistake. When his vulgar characters talk in the Florentine dialect he makes them distort words far more than the common people actually used to do. His object, of course, was to raise a laugh; but he sacrificed truth, and now, at any rate, his provincialisms are wearisome. Chiari, besides certain mad and impossible romances, whose success rather turned his head, wrote seven volumes of comedies in verse. He was sufficiently daring in his experiments, but the result was not happy. Neither Fagiuoli nor

Chiari could depict the habits of the age, and their works now suffer deserved neglect.

Such was the condition of the Italian stage when **Carlo Goldoni** (1707–1793) appeared to reform it. From his earliest years, which were passed at Venice, he was familiar with theatrical exhibitions. His grandfather, who was in good circumstances, used to regale his guests with dramatic representations, and his father kept a puppet-show in the house for Goldoni's sole delectation. The elder Goldoni, having squandered his patrimony, attempted to mend matters by practising as a physician at Rome, while the son was bred to the law. He won considerable success in his profession, but the dramatic instinct, fostered through two generations, proved too strong to be held in. After several essays in tragedy, tragi-comedy and the melodrama, whereby he tested his powers, Goldoni seriously took up the task of restoring Italian comedy and placing it on a level with that of France. His labour was not in vain. Of this we have gratuitous testimony in a letter of Voltaire, who described him as having rescued Italy from the hands of the harlequins. Goldoni's services to Italian literature can, indeed, scarcely be overestimated. He composed about a hundred and fifty comedies, in which he dealt with every phase of domestic life, sketched every passion, and showed in other ways a thorough comprehension of his art. His characterisations are true to life, his language natural, and his treatment generally is marked by none of that extravagance which had disfigured the *commedia dell' arte*. He restored comedy to the purity of form which it possessed before the imitators of Lope de Vega miscellanized it by an admixture of foreign elements.

Goldoni's achievements won for him great respect, even

reverence, on the part of the Italian nation; but in revenge they excited the bitterest resentment in two classes of persons —lovers of the seventeenth century drama, who could hardly be expected to give up their idol without a struggle, and a coterie of learned men, who, whilst approving his programme, were instigated by various motives—chiefly jealousy—to thwart and disparage him. Count **Carlo Gozzi** (1720–1806)— to be carefully distinguished from his brother Count Gaspare, a different man in all respects—rendered himself especially conspicuous by his enmity to Goldoni, and, casting about for some method of attack, became the champion of the *commedia dell' arte.* In conjunction with Sacchi, a famous comedian of the day, he produced a play which he entitled *L' Amore delle Tre Melarance*, a farrago of fantastic and supernatural personages, incantations, wonderful adventures, and everything likely to appeal to the hearts of the populace. This, being acted at the carnival in Venice, obtained a complete success, and its author was flattered by Baretti as the most original genius Italy had ever known and comparable only to Shakespeare. Elated at this triumph, Gozzi proceeded to publish several volumes of what he called *Fiabe*, and wrote a discourse in which he openly vilified Chiari and Goldoni. The efforts he makes to exalt *impromptu* at the expense of written comedy are extremely clumsy and excite the question whether he properly understood either the one or the other. His theories, if such loose talk can be dignified by the name, are dictated solely by antagonism to Goldoni, and in his dramas all that he did was to exaggerate the bad features already introduced by the Cicognini.

Italians agree in assigning to Goldoni the first place among their comic writers; but, needless to say, he is not faultless. His works were injured by the haste with which they were

produced. In one year alone he composed no less than sixteen comedies. He was thus prevented from giving to his dramas those final touches they want in order to be perfect. As it is, they are marred by redundancy, by that loquacity which is, as it were, the congenital vice of comic writers. Another defect, naturally more strongly felt by Italians than by foreigners, is that, in spite of the trouble he took to acquire pure Tuscan, he never was able to attain that hardly definable something, that *atticism* (let us call it), which in former days had gone far to redeem works of little or no sterling merit. The comedies Goldoni wrote in his native dialect are looked upon by Venetians as masterpieces.

The natural order of things would prescribe that, having reviewed the fortunes of comedy and the melodrama in the eighteenth century, we should now proceed to consider the position of tragedy during the same epoch. It will be convenient, however, at this point to allude to certain persons who, though they do not rank high as original writers, played no unimportant part in the regeneration of Italian letters. The special task assigned to them was that of bringing before their country models of good writing. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ages sufficiently unlike his own, Dante's influence had ceased to operate. Now, in the general but vague desire for reform, attention began once more to be paid to him. An account of the way this came about will show better than anything else the depravation of taste and the depth to which Dante had sunk in the estimation of his countrymen.

The restitution to the great Florentine of his rightful place is due in a large measure to **Alfonso Varano** (1705–1788), a man of distinguished family, who spent his whole life in the

study of the national literature. He seems to have attempted many sorts of composition, sonnets, panegyrics and the like; but his most famous poem, apart from those which will shortly be named, is his *Incanteismo*, an eclogue which won for him fame throughout Italy. He composed some respectable tragedies also in imitation of Maffei's *Merope*. It is doubtful, however, whether all these works combined would have given him lasting remembrance without his *Visioni*, the origin of which was as follows:

The theory had been enounced by Voltaire that Christianity is as much opposed to poetry as paganism is favourable to it. Varano, who was a very pious man, was greatly scandalized by this saying and resolved to confute it. In the preface to his *Visioni* he cites Dante, in particular the episode of Ugolini, as worthy of comparison with anything in the entire range of pagan literature. The *Visioni* themselves, based on Dante and the books of the Bible, present a notable contrast to Varano's earlier works, written in a flowery and grandiloquent style, and accordingly after the success of his *Visioni* he rejected several as unripe juvenile compositions. To-day it is not easy to comprehend the enthusiasm which greeted the *Visioni*, and led even Frugoni to indite complimentary verses to 'his excellence the divine Alfonso Varano.' The harshness, dissonance and Dantesque rhythm, gained by lavish expenditure of midnight oil or wanton abuse of daylight, only show that Dante is inimitable.

Varano's action was not universally approved. The Arcadians and the partisans of French literature regarded it as a direct challenge to themselves. **Count Francesco Algarotti** (1712–1764), especially, amused himself with discreditable sarcasms concerning Dante, and, in collaboration with Frugoni and Bettinelli, edited a book of blank verse as

a model for novices. Algarotti, however, was a courtier, and with the astuteness born of long intercourse with princes perceived that the wind was veering in Dante's favour. He therefore dissociated himself from his colleagues and declared that he had had no share in Bettinelli's evil designs. **Saverio Bettinelli** (1718–1808) was a Jesuit, a man of keen observant intellect, but shallow. As he outlived Parini and Alfieri and was older than Monti and Foscolo, he was called in his old age the Nestor of Italian men of letters, and at one time his *Risorgimento d' Italia* enjoyed a high reputation. Patriotic Italians, however, will never forgive his *Lettere di Virgilio agli Arcadi*, a senseless libel, in which with impudence and profanity he assailed the Father of Italian Literature. These disgraceful epistles drew a reply, *Difesa di Dante*, from Gaspare Gozzi. Gaspare, unlike his brother, was naturally modest and retiring, but the burning indignation which he felt at Bettinelli's indecencies overcame all his reserve. When in 1758 Antonio Zappi, a Venetian, projected a splendid edition of all Dante's works, he invited Gaspare Gozzi to write a vindication of the poet. Gozzi accepted the offer; but, instead of answering Bettinelli in his own vulgar and declamatory style, assumed a pleasant ironical tone. He paints the excitement of the shades in Elysium over the Virgilian letters. The poets assembled there accuse Bettinelli of forgery and counsel him to read over the *Commedia* at his leisure, that so he may judge of it with greater modesty and discretion. This intelligence is supposed to have been communicated to Zappi by Anton Francesco Doni, an eccentric genius of the sixteenth century.

Gaspare Gozzi (1713–1786) was so worthy and amiable that a few words may fitly be spared to him. He was born of an illustrious family at Venice and, having been bereft of his parents in childhood, devoted himself to literature. He

married a wife of like tastes with himself, and they had many children. As Gozzi had no aptitude for business, his patrimony was soon spent, and he was compelled to eke out a livelihood by correcting proofs, writing reviews and prefaces, and translating from those languages with which he was conversant. However, he did not entirely forswear original composition, and Monti calls him the most classical prose-writer of his age. It is fitting, therefore, to divide his writings into two classes—those which are mere journey-work, as for instance a version he made of a very long work by Fleury, and those more properly his own. Of the latter the most celebrated are his *Osservatore* and *Sermoni*. The *Osservatore* was a periodical, copied from the *Spectator* of Addison and his friends, and in contributing to it Gozzi displayed a prolific faculty for invention, an easy and graceful style, purity of language, and an urbane but most poignant satire. He thus won the name of the Lucian of Italy. In his *Sermoni* he chose Horace as a pattern and happily illustrated his theory of what imitation in these cases ought to be. This is, that the earlier writer may be taken as a guide up to a certain point, after which the disciple should be able to strike out a course for himself.

Gozzi's judgment was distinguished by its sanity and moderation, qualities conspicuously lacking in his friend **Giuseppe Baretti** (1717–1789). The latter, however, was no less zealous a crusader against bad taste. In his youth he had been an omnivorous reader, and the habit seems to have occasioned his well-wishers some alarm. At any rate, one day a certain acquaintance, eager for the boy's improvement, tore from him a copy of Marini and gave him one of Berni instead. From that moment Berni became his god. In 1751 Baretti passed over to England, where he published

the *Italian Library* and his fine dictionary, and made the acquaintance of Johnson, Burke, and other eminent men. On his return he availed himself of his English studies to attempt by criticism a reform of the national literature. But for this task Baretti was hardly qualified. He had nothing of the calmness, the self-possession of a philosopher; but was, on the contrary, vehement, obstinate, intolerant, the slave of his own predilections. His *Frusta Letteraria* is remarkable for the honesty, variety, and capriciousness of its judgments. He pronounced on writers without the least regard to the times in which they lived, and, led away by some inscrutable prejudice, fiercely attacked a great author for the object of elevating an obscure poetaster. Evidently this *Frusta* is a book which craves cautious handling. It contains ample proofs of Baretti's genius and independence, but if his opinions had prevailed the result would have been chaos. Baretti died in 1789 in London.

The writer, however, who contributed most of all to the overthrow of the Arcadians was **Melchiorre Cesarotti** (1730–1808). He made his *début* in literature by translating a tragedy of Aeschylus and three of Voltaire. These versions are not at all out of the common—they may even be described as weak. Cesarotti, however, formed a close friendship with one of the Sackvilles, who told him of the poems of Ossian, then recently published by Macpherson. Fascinated by such specimens as could be conveyed to him in bad Italian, Cesarotti set himself to learn English. In about six months he had translated into Italian verse all of Ossian which had been published up to that date. Ossian's poems, as is well known, occasioned great controversy—their authenticity was impugned. But the question whether or not they are genuine has no bearing on their importance as

regards Italy. Macpherson's prose was often rough, bombastic, ungainly. The Italian verse of Cesarotti, on the contrary, was most elegant. He repeated Chiabrera's experiment of combining words, but carried it to far greater lengths. As was natural, the Arcadians were horrified at his licence and did their best to put him down; but the magic of his verse had an ineffable charm for the generality of Italians, attracted both by its novelty and splendour. Cesarotti therefore triumphed signally.

A few years later he ventured on a still more daring attempt by offering to treat Homer in the same summary manner as the Caledonian bard. Considering that respect for Homer was in a large measure conventional, and that the *Iliad* was simply a mass of materials for some great *future* poem, he, Cesarotti, undertook to construct that poem. As evidence of his intention he changed the title of the work and called it *Morte d' Ettore.* Although it was allowed both by friends and foes that the poem had in it many eloquent passages, Cesarotti's warmest, most sincere admirers, deplored its production, and he himself, perceiving his mistake, joined in the general laugh which consigned his precious Iliad to oblivion. Cesarotti's prose was elegant but not in the Italian manner. His style in fact was adapted from the French, and Foscolo observed that Cesarotti would be found, if the terminations were altered, to have written not only in French but in very good French.

Chiefly through the patronage of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, the primacy of literature, which had once pertained to Florence, was now transferred to Milan. There **Giuseppe Parini** (1729–1790) attempted to do for letters what Beccaria and others had already accomplished for moral science. Parini was born of poor parents, and a large part

of his life was spent under conditions which were most hateful to his noble and aspiring temper. He was first a lawyer's clerk and then, after his poems had procured for him some repute, a tutor in different aristocratic families. Although the scenes which he had to witness were extremely odious to him, they had their value, for they quickened his observation and afforded subjects for his pen. Among Italian men of letters at this time there were two parties—the *grammarians*, who clung to the traditional style, without, however, infusing a breath of real interest into it, and the *progressists* who, in adopting French ideas, imported along with them French idioms. Parini took a middle course. Whilst an advocate of progress, he attempted to keep the Italian language as pure as possible. Eventually he was appointed professor of eloquence at the Studio di Brera at Milan, and lectured on literature. His discourses, wherein he eschews grandeur of expression and imposing abstractions, are a standing testimony to his good sense and delicacy of taste. Unlike his contemporary **Francesco Milizia**, who, in order to dispose of the Michelangiolists, was disrespectful to the great sculptor himself, Parini could appreciate Petrarch and those who successfully imitated him, and yet mete out a just condemnation to those who, by mingled feebleness and ambition, had made 'Petrarchist' a term of reproach.

But Parini was something more than a critic. His ode *Caduta*, in which he gave a practical illustration of his principles, is one of the most felicitous in Italian literature. His chief work, however, is a mock didactic poem—*Il Giorno.* As has been said, Parini in his quality of tutor had ample opportunities for studying the manners of the great, and the sentiment which the spectacle had evoked was that of disgust. Parini was not alone in that feeling. An immense number

of satirists were at work scourging the conscience. Unfortunately, this open method of war produced not the least impression on the objects of their attack, and Parini, with his profound knowledge of the human heart, perceived that the surest means for effecting his purpose was to dissemble. He composed a work which was as striking for the novelty of the design as for the perfect way in which that design was executed. The author feigns to instruct a young nobleman in the duties and usages with which he will have to comply if he aspires to the character of a finished gentleman. In order to do this more conveniently he breaks up the day into its four component parts—*Mattino*, *Mezzogiorno*, *Vespro* and *Notte*—the titles of the subdivisions of the poem. Partly that he might give a greater *vraisemblance* to his work, partly to enhance the irony, Parini enters into the minutest details and gravely sets forth the infinite follies constituting the code of politeness.

Il Giorno is a work of high genius. Not only is it written in a most exquisite style, but the arrangement evinces great judgment. A mere enumeration, however skilful, might have affected us with a sense of monotony, but Parini forestalls this possibility by weaving in some admirable episodes, such as the story of the invention of *tric trac*, the discovery of the sofa, the peace between Cupid and Hymenaeus, the origin of social inequality, and the recital of the ills of a domestic guilty of treading on the foot of the *vergine Caccia delle Grazie alunna*. The poem is in blank verse, of which Parini has a rare mastery. Frugoni, who regarded this class of poetry as his special province, confessed after reading Parini that he never knew till then how to write blank verse. And yet Parini was dissatisfied. As he went on he seemed to gain, more and more, fresh insight into the potentialities of his

art. This caused him to delay the publication of the last two parts of his *Giorno*, which, in effect, only saw the light after his death. To us, however, they appear quite as finished as we could have hoped, nor can anyone detect the slightest inequality between the later and the earlier instalments.

Among Parini's contemporaries were many writers of note. **Passeroni** (1713–1803) indited a long epic in caricature on the life of Cicero, which, however, cannot be commended. He was more happy in his fables. This latter sort of poetry was cultivated also by **Pignotti** (1739–1812), author of a history of Tuscany, by **Bertola** (1753–1798) and by **Clasio**, and their works are still read with pleasure. The only other author to whom we need pay attention is **Giambattista Casti** (1721–1804), who wrote a poetical satire on the European courts entitled *Animali Parlanti*. He composed also several melodramas of a comic nature, notably *Congiura di Catilina*, and a political satire on the Russian Court, in eight-lined stanzas, *Il Poema Tartaro*. These works display considerable talent, but repel by their coarseness.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAGEDIANS AND MELI.

The vicissitudes of the tragic drama during the eighteenth century have now to be recorded. In reference to **Scipione Maffei** mention was made incidentally of *Merope*. This play was represented first of all at Modena, and then repeatedly in various cities of Italy. Maffei was overwhelmed with congratulations from every part of Europe. His tragedy was translated by Pope. Voltaire also thought very highly of it, wrote a flattering letter to the author and afterwards composed a piece on the same subject, when, characteristically, he published some disparaging remarks about it under an assumed name. In Italy itself, where theatrical taste was not yet thoroughly educated, *Merope* was compelled to submit to certain transformations. It was reduced to prose, love-scenes and interludes were inserted in it; but from the moment of its production it became a necessary part of every manager's *répertoire*.

Whilst Gravina, like most other wise critics, exerted himself to quell the Gallicizing spirit, **Pier Jacopo Martello** (1665–1727) did his best to foster it. He caused French plays to be translated and turned into prose, and, having seen them in high

favour with the audience, endeavoured to introduce French tragedy bodily—without any alteration in structure, mechanism, or even versification. He was very anxious that the metre of tragedy should be Alexandrine, and sought to find precedents for it. He could not, however, find anything later or more relevant than some fragments of Ciullo d' Alcamo. As this did not satisfy the critics, Martello fell back on another method of justifying himself. He declared that his verse was *italianissimo*, that it consisted in fact of two short heptasyllabic verses like those employed by Speroni in his *Canace*. Owing to the controversy which arose about them the verses in question received the name *Martelliani*, but they were never domesticated in Italian tragedy. Occasionally they were used in playful compositions, and they were adopted, in some of his writings, by Goldoni.

Maffei was a sincere admirer of French tragedy, but, as he was not blind to its defects, he did not allow himself to be trapped into the prevalent belief that the dramas of the reign of Louis XIV were equal to those of Sophocles. He knew also that the great French writers were indebted for not a few hints to his own countrymen of an earlier date, that for examples of tragic writing an Italian need not look abroad. He, therefore, tried to copy the excellences of Trissino, Rucellai, Giraldi, Tasso and others, whilst avoiding their faults. And in this he was greatly aided by the criticisms of Tassoni, Zeno and Muratori.

Maffei's *Merope* did not owe its fame to mere accident. It has much intrinsic merit. The scenes are skilfully laid, the characters are veracious, and there is a great variety of accident. Yet this drama had no progeny. It was not given to Maffei to create a school of tragedy. That distinction was reserved for Vittorio Alfieri. Before referring to that

great master of dramatic composition it will be right to devote some space to **Antonio Conti** (1677–1749), who enriched his country with four pieces of political tragedy. Conti lived for some time in England, where he learnt to love Shakespeare. On his return to Italy, at the mature age of fifty, he conceived the thought of carrying tragedy a step further than Maffei had brought it, and, adopting a suggestion of Gravina, chose his subjects out of ancient Roman history. He composed, one after another, *Giunio Bruto, Marco Bruto, Cesare* and *Druso*. These dramas are best on the side of invention. Thus in *Giunio Bruto* Conti makes Tito, son of the liberator, fall in love with the daughter of the tyrant. The episode is admirably introduced, and that for two reasons: first because it leads to interesting situations, and secondly because it gives further expression to the grand but inexorable character of the protagonist. The most serious defect in Conti's plays is their want of artistic form. In his moral conception of the drama he may possibly excel Alfieri; but in other qualities, such as male and sinewy language, pregnant breviloquence in the dialogue, and dramatic movement, he comes far short of him. This, perhaps, was because he did not pay attention to dramatic poetry till late in life, or he may have had a greater faculty for conceiving ideas than for putting them into execution.

The life of **Alfieri** (1749–1803) reads like a romance. It is a remarkable instance of genius triumphing over difficulties of a most unusual kind. He was born of a noble family at Asti, and, like others of his class, he appears to have regarded literary studies as a disparagement to his rank. As a boy he was sent to school, but he seems to have turned his opportunities to little or no account, and when the time came for him to bid his preceptors good-bye, felt it a blessed release.

Thereafter he plunged into amusements and dissipations, but amidst them all was continually tormented by an inward unrest, as though in some way he were not fulfilling his destiny. At this time his reading entirely consisted of a few French novels and a drama or two of Metastasio, but, far from comprehending the true worth of the latter, he thought of them as *libretti*.

In January, 1774, when Alfieri was watching by the bedside of a sick mistress, the idea struck him of relieving the weary hours by sketching the scene of a play in which the persons were to be Photinus, a woman whom he ignorantly named Lachesis, and Cleopatra. The drama, under the title of *Cleopatra*, was acted about a year later in the Teatro Carignano at Turin and received with great applause. This unlooked-for success threw the lucky, or luckless, author into a state of cruel perplexity. He was, he knew, utterly destitute of equipment for a literary career. Here at twenty-seven he was ignorant even of the rudiments of learning! Except when he availed himself of the Piedmontese dialect, he had always been used to speak French, and did not know a jot of Italian properly so called. In order to fit himself for his mission he underwent a strict apprenticeship. As a first step he placed himself in the charge of a tutor that he might learn those simple lessons which he had neglected in boyhood. He then betook himself to Tuscany, where Italian was spoken in the greatest purity, and attempted to rid himself of the Gallicisms which clung to him as the effect of long usage, and from which to the last he could never wholly emancipate himself. Here, however, he was confirmed in his determination to win for Italy that distinction in tragedy which Gravina, Maffei and Conti, with all their philosophizing and poetizing, had failed to achieve. Having made up his

mind to this, he published a kind of manifesto *Della tirannide*, in which he announced himself as the uncompromising advocate of liberty, in politics, in morals, and in literature.

Alfieri wrote many works widely differing in character, and by no means of uniform merit, but all breathe a generous love of country, and have as their supreme object the making of an Italian nation. Owing to their number it is impossible to go over all in detail. It must suffice to select the more important. His epic *Etruria Liberata*, in which he sings of the assassination of Alessandro de' Medici by his kinsman Lorenzino, need not detain us. The time had gone by for the writing of epics, and Alfieri's impulsive temperament ill suited him for the composition of a work demanding the easy flow, pompous description, and full treatment of a heroic poem. His version of the Aeneid, made for his own pleasure, and on which, being a labour of love, he bestowed all possible pains, shows clearly enough that his talents did not lie in this direction. He slightly improved the sonnet of his day by giving to it a robuster gait, but his odes, though the subjects are worthy of Pindar—*e.g. America Liberata* and *Parigi Sbastigliato*—are wanting in force. His satire verges too much on invective; he is too pungent and direct, and of the subtle irony of Parini he has nothing. His epigrams partake of the same fault, though some of them are very fine, and both in epigram and satire he is distinctly original. His prose is full of matter; the style is manly, and the language, with the exceptions already noted, pure.

One cause of offence, which pervades all his writings but is most visible in his prose, is a harshness in the rhythm. It is hard to say from what this defect arose, whether acci-

dentally, from the fact that he wrote Italian, so to speak, as a foreigner, or, as is not impossible, from a deliberate intention, his object being to win back the language from the nervelessness and flaccidity to which it had been reduced by the grammarians. In any case it *is* a defect. To say, however, with some, that Alfieri must be regarded as a philosopher and not as an artist, is a gross mistake. This may be true of him as a prose-writer, but, applied to his dramatic composition, the verdict is ludicrously false. His dramas are of a simplicity which is in striking contrast with the conception of the art then prevalent, and which it might be thought was copied from Greece. The reverse, however, is the truth. At the time when he began to write, he did not know so much as the names of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and, never having read any French tragedies, was not acquainted with their methods, even indirectly.

The co-incidence, therefore, is fortuitous, or rather, we might say, is to be ascribed to identical conclusions worked out by men in whom tragedy was incarnate. One of these conclusions was that nothing must be introduced to disturb the illusion. This was the real meaning of the three unities, of time, place, and action: and Alfieri by sheer instinct obeyed the same rule. This instinct was affirmed by meditation and his dramas, commencing from his *abbozzaccio*, as he called it, *Cleopatra* to *Saul*, and the two *Bruto's* show a progressive development towards that ideal of tragedy which had limned itself on his mind. Alfieri banished the rabble of superfluous characters and concentrated his energies on the leading personages, who, while they are designed on a colossal scale, are rounded off with the patient unfaltering hand of a master. His *Saul*, in particular, is gigantic and not unworthy of a place beside the Prometheus of

Aeschylus. Alfieri's extraordinary success is largely owing to what seemed at first an insuperable obstacle—his illiteracy. It was this which gave him boldness and independence, which made him refuse to bow to convention and vain authority.

Alfieri had a theory that towards the age of forty the creative powers of the mind are exhausted, and that a writer should then abandon original composition for the exercise of his critical faculties. Conformably with this opinion he did not attempt, after that period, to add to his list of tragedies. His last years were spent in learning Greek, speculating on art, translating the classics, and criticising his own works. As regards the last, he pointed out with admirable candour what he considered to be their defects, while, at the same time, he did not allow himself to be prevented by a false feeling of modesty from instancing their merits. He thus, as it were, combated in advance the attacks which were made on his reputation by A. W. Schlegel, and which were taken up, to their everlasting shame, by a horde of degenerate Italians. Alfieri's translations of Aristophanes and Terence are good, and occasionally even brilliant, but it must be confessed, his genius does not lend itself much to works of this class. His own comedies, of which he wrote six, are deficient in the negligent ease, the happy *abandon* which is the essence of good comedy. On the whole, however, Alfieri is one of the grandest figures in Italian literature since Tasso.

It will be convenient at this point to take a side-glance at Sicily, the birth-place of Italian literature. At length; in the eighteenth century, after a long period of sterility, there began to appear in it new signs of life. Among the Sicilians who distinguished themselves at this time may be mentioned Caruso, Mongitore, Di Giovanni, Amico and Testa. Mon-

gitore especially worked in the field of Sicilian biography, and produced an immense work, entitled *Bibliotheca Sicula*, comprising the lives of the most eminent Sicilians from the earliest times to his own. The compilation, however, though a monument of patience and erudition, is wholly uncritical. At a much later period **Domenico Scinà**, in order to justify his existence as royal historiographer, wrote an account of Sicilian literature during the eighteenth century. From these writings it is evident that there was always a plentiful supply of learned men in the island, of whom, however, not one attained to real distinction. The reason is probably twofold: first, the political isolation of Sicily, and secondly, its distance from Tuscany, compelling scholars to learn the Tuscan speech as a dead language from books.

Meantime the native Sicilian dialect was not quite neglected. From the sixteenth century onwards we meet with a goodly number of writers all striving to ennoble their mother speech. Such, for example, are Antonio Veneziano (surnamed the Sicilian Petrarch), Monsignore Requesens Rao, Eredia, Vallegio, Giudici, Aversa, Gaetani, Montagna, Rallo, Triolo, Puglisi, Catania, and many others. The most ambitious however was **Giuseppe Vitali**, the Blind Man of Ganci, who wrote a long epic poem *Sicilia Liberata*, which treated of the Norman conquest of the island, and which, defective as we now find it, was the admiration of his contemporaries. Still greater celebrity was gained by **Domenico Tempio**, not so much from his talents as from the impurity of his poems, which in this respect are worthy to rank with Casti's.

Tempio's popularity was at its height when **Giovanni Meli** (1740–1815), not then twenty years of age, published his *Fata Galante*, a bernesque poem which, despite the remi-

niscences which it contained of other writers, had so abundant a vein of poetry, such a troop of happy phrases, such exquisite and natural tints, as instantly to eclipse all rival compositions; and Sicily, full of enthusiasm, riveted its attention on the young aspirant from whom it confidently expected achievements as yet unparalleled. These expectations were not destined to fall. Meli, as an ecclesiastical dignitary, had the *entrée* into the halls of the nobles, then (owing to the Spanish ascendancy) intensely exclusive and aristocratic, and his researches in science had made him Professor of Chemistry in the University of Palermo, but he never allowed himself to be seduced by extraneous ambitions. He fraternized with the people, observed their ways, learnt their proverbs, and thus caught their essential spirit. His writings therefore have a distinct and original and indigenous flavour, like those of Burns.

Meli composed quite an encyclopaedia of verse—eclogues, lyrical poems, satires, elegies, fables, of which a large number were published after his decease. The three most important are his *Fata Galante* already mentioned, *Don Chisciotte*, and *Origine del Mondo*. In *Don Chisciotte*, a mock heroic poem, Meli pretends that Cervantes has omitted some doughty deeds of the knight which are well worthy of being sung. While, however, the composition has many excellent points, notably a lively fancy, one acquainted with Cervantes' masterpiece necessarily misses the charm of novelty. The real hero is not Don Quixote, but Sancho Panza, whose shade in the concluding 'vision' appears to the author and converses with him on the moral of the poem. Although it must needs forego the praise of originality *Don Chisciotte* cannot be refused such honour as is due to glamour of style and still greater glamour of colouring.

Meli's *Origine del Mondo* is a pleasant satire on various philosophical theories regarding the origin of the world. Jupiter is depicted in the midst of his celestial family, who debate as to the best mode of creating the world which as yet is not. The decision ultimately is that it shall be composed of Jupiter's body, which is forthwith pulled to pieces. In allusion to the ancient arms of the island (representing a head with three legs bended) Sicily is imagined to have been formed from the head of the god. It is evident the poem has a special reference to Pantheism.

Meli's odes are somewhat clogged by the mythological harness in which, obediently to the ideas of the age, he deemed it necessary to envelop them. His fables are ingenious and some of them original, while in naturalness of expression he far surpasses most modern fabulists. As a satirist he is keen, but not brutal. Meli wrote also a dithyramb which even Sicilians unacquainted with the drinking customs and slang of the people find hard reading, but which to a connoisseur in such matters affords fresh proof of his extraordinary powers. His best work, however, is his pastoral and anacreontic verse, in which he will never be excelled. Though born in the land of idylls he did not copy Theocritus —versions of Anacreon, however, existed—for the all-sufficient reason that he did not know the Greek alphabet. On the contrary, what he did was to examine the popular songs of his country, not that he might ape them, but that he might win their secret—the art of writing naturally. Meli's poetry is quite untranslatable, so much depending on *nuances* or shades of meaning which a foreigner is incapable of appreciating, and for which peninsular Italian can find no real or satisfying expressions. By his contemporaries—

Alfieri, Cesarotti, Casti, Monti—Meli was held in the highest esteem. They all knew him to be no mere dealer in provincialisms, seeking a spurious reputation by eccentricity and caprice, but a genuine poet brimful of the noblest feeling.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REVOLUTION AND THE REACTION.

The eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century cannot be said to have produced historians at all comparable to Machiavelli or Sarpi. There was, it is true, indefatigable research. Every cranny almost in the peninsula was ransacked for evidence of the past, but the writers of the period either devoted themselves to particular aspects of history, or by accumulating material prepared the way for future historians. Reference has been already made to **Muratori**, the father or, as he has been termed, perhaps more accurately, *foster father* of modern Italian history. Next in succession was **Pietro Giannone** (1676–1748). He was born in a village of Monte Gargano, and his parents, advised of his unusual talents, sent him to Naples, where he had as his teacher the learned Aulisio. Unlike the majority of those who have been mentioned in the course of this narrative, Giannone entered into his legal studies with zest, and made himself known by his essays on the origin of Roman Law.

It was thus that he became cognizant of a void in Italian literature. There were many histories descriptive of war and external politics, but a civil history—one, that is to say, commemorating the changes of laws and institutions under the various governments which successively sprang up in

different parts of the peninsula—there was none. Giannone, however, perceived that a task of such magnitude, if it was to be properly carried out, was beyond the powers of any individual writer. Accordingly he resolved to limit his work to the kingdom of Naples. Whilst occupied with it, he happened to be engaged in a suit in which it fell to his lot to defend the rights of certain citizens against the encroachments of the bishops. This necessitated the inspection of an enormous number of church laws, decretals, edicts, privileges, and customs, and Giannone was led to see that civil history—at any rate in the catholic world—could not be dealt with apart from ecclesiastical history. He arrived at the conclusion that the secular power of the church, and especially the old feudal pretensions of the Court of Rome to the States of Naples and Sicily, had been a fruitful cause of controversies and discords. His composition, therefore, is somewhat in the nature of a polemic or, it might be stricter to say of a scientific work, being a perpetual discussion of law. This consideration will serve to excuse its artistic defects and the frequent thefts from Porzio, Costanzo and other historians of Naples. Each of the forty books into which the history is divided sets out with a brief historical proem, which is made, as it were, the pivot for subsequent disquisitions. The chief fault of Giannone's work is this:—during the many centuries his history traverses he sees only the Empire and the Church contending for the mastery. The position of the people he totally ignores.

A very voluminous writer, who possessed a vivid imagination, was **Carlo Denina** (1731–1813). He was one of the class who delighted to call themselves *beaux esprits*, and first brought himself into notice by a work on the vicissitudes of literature—showy enough, but unsubstantial. For this he

was visited with the sarcasms of Voltaire, and Denina's fortune was made. The highest achievement, however, was a historical work entitled *Rivoluzioni d'Italia* in which he displays not only much learning, but something also of the philosophic spirit, since he attempts to explore the hidden causes which lay behind the events.

One of the most thoughtful and generously written works of the age is **Pietro Verri's** *Storia di Milano*. **Verri** (1728–1797) might have ranked with the greatest historians of his country but for one grievous and, indeed, unpardonable fault —his negligent and almost barbarous style. In his *Pensieri* on the spirit of Italian literature, he vehemently protests against the tyranny of the schools, embodied in those whom he names the Aristotelians of letters; and full of disgust at the vices of the *parolai* or word-mongers, he positively glories in uncouthness. That this was largely affectation is proved by those passages in which, involuntarily as it were, he rises to eloquence and power. The materials of the *Storia* were drawn, to a considerable extent, from the *Memorie della Città e della Campagna di Milano* of his countryman Giulini, but notwithstanding this and his faults as a stylist, the Milanesi persist in regarding him as the best of their historians.

The man who should restore history to its earlier symmetry and graceful artistic form was, however, yet to appear. In 1808 **Carlo Botta** (1766–1837) published his *Storia della guerra della Indepenza americana*, which is incontestably a masterpiece. Botta was a physician and, moreover, took an active part in politics, but he managed to find time for indulging his taste for literature. His admiration for the Latin and Greek historians, and even more for the Italian historians of the sixteenth century, amounted to superstition. From them he gleaned those felicities, those charms of

language, which form such a pleasing contrast with the harshness and morosity of the *Storia di Milano*. If Botta's *Storia d'America* was received with favour, his *Storia d'Italia*, comprising the twenty-five eventful years from the outbreak of the French Revolution to the fall of Buonaparte, was hailed with enthusiasm. There were several reasons why this was the case. Botta, emboldened by the success of his first writing, displayed greater freedom both in thought and expression. The subject also was a national one, and it was treated by the writer with all the glow of patriotic sentiment. By some, indeed, Botta is accused of malignity towards the French. They say that he has painted Napoleon far blacker than the emperor ever deserved. The justice of this accusation may be doubted, and even if it were found to be true, it must be remembered that Botta was still smarting from his wounds and hardly amenable therefore to the ordinary rules of criticism. A more valid objection is that Botta is deficient in insight, that he does not understand the political game of chess, as appears still more evidently in his continuation of Guiccardini.

Lastly must be named **Pietro Colletta** (1775–1831). This writer was born at Naples; studied mathematics and embraced the profession of a soldier. In 1799 he was imprisoned and cashiered, he then became a civil engineer. Seven years later he rejoined the army, and under Murat attained the rank of major-general. After the return of the Bourbons he was suffered to keep his post, and on the outbreak of the revolution of 1821 was sent to Sicily to restore order. When Naples was seized by the Austrians, Colletta was first imprisoned and afterwards banished to Moravia whence he made his way to Florence. Here he was urged by several literary friends to set down his reminiscences of the

events in which he had been implicated, but for Colletta, who was wholly unversed in good Italian, this was no easy matter. The difficulty, however, was surmounted, partly through Colletta's own indefatigable study, and partly through the kindness of those same literary friends in revising his manuscript; and, as the final result, the work had all the appearance of being written by a veteran in authorship.

Among the poets that adorned the period of the Revolution, none is more prominent than **Vincenzo Monti** (1754–1828), who was born in Romagna and came to Rome to seek his fortune. The first composition by which he attracted notice was a poem in honour of a celebrated preacher. It was a biblical vision in the manner of Varano. Although Monti was then only sixteen years old, the piece was highly commended, and deemed to possess merits not to be traced in its supposed model. After this Monti quickly rose to the position of the leading man of letters in Italy. Unfortunately for his fame his great abilities were not balanced by a corresponding strength of character, and his works bear witness to his successive apostasies. His poems may be divided into three classes: first, those written in support of the Papacy and to discredit the French Revolution; secondly, those indited in the hour of the Revolution's triumph; thirdly, those composed after the accession to power of Napoleon Buonaparte. It ought, however, in extenuation of this weakness to be recorded that, though Monti's public career was deformed by shameless recantations, in private he was kindest and most indulgent of men. His poetry is clearly influenced by study of the *Divine Comedy*, which in Monti's youth had been drawn from obscurity by the imitations of Varano, Bettinelli's *Lettere*, and Gozzi's reply.

Almost all Monti's compositions take the form of a vision,

and this is the case with the very greatest of them all, *Bassvilliana*. The hero of the poem (which is left unfinished at the end of the fourth canto) is Hugo Bassville, an agent of the French Republican Government, who, on his arrival at Rome, was torn to pieces by the infuriated populace. While his corpse lies unburied on the banks of the Tiber, his spirit is conducted by an angel on a mysterious pilgrimage. The poet takes occasion to review the chief events of the Revolution and mercilessly chastises the writers who had been the primary cause of it. In his *Pericolo* and *Superstizione*, poems which belong to the second period of Monti's literary existence, he quite alters his tone. To his jaundiced eye Louis XVI now appears a tyrant and Pius VI, erewhile praised as a strict and holy pastor, is vilified in outrageous terms. Thirdly, in his *Giove terreno*, *Spada di Federigo*, *Bardo della selva nera*, *Jerogamia di Creta*, and *Api Panacridi*, Monti becomes an abject worshipper of Napoleon. After Buonaparte's exit, with the same venality for which he had been always notorious, he made his peace with the victors, and ceasing to pour forth heroic strains, applied himself to the safe, though somewhat humdrum pursuit of philology.

The world of letters was then agitated by an effort at reform on the part of a sect who, in contradistinction to frenchified writers, called themselves Purists. This movement was the natural sequel to the vigorous protests of those great Italian intellects referred to in the last chapter, but in the hands of the present leaders it was carried to a ridiculous extreme. The most fanatical among them was **Antonio Cesari**, who could find nothing in the compositions of the moderns to satisfy him. He himself wrote a variety of works including novels, three large volumes which he entitled *Bellezze della*

Divina Commedia, translations of several Latin poets, and an *Antidoto per i giovani studiosi*, in which he warned novices against all literature posterior to the fourteenth century. This egregious apostle of purism Monti resolved to assail, in which enterprise he took as his ally his son-in-law **Giulio Perticari.** The latter, while not a man of great intellectual resource, possessed excellent taste, and was therefore well qualified to be Monti's lieutenant. The fruit of their joint labours was a work entitled *Proposta di correzioni al Vocabolario della Crusca*, which, though only a grammatical treatise, has on it the gleam of genius.

To conclude what requires to be said about Monti—most of his work is characterized by monotony of invention. He is always bringing spectres and shades of heroes on the stage. Hence his poetry has been termed with some force a *perpetual phantasmagoria*. Monti wrote three tragedies. Of these *Caio Gracco* is the best, possessing, indeed, considerable merit, though the writer exhibits too great a tendency to declamation. More notable than his dramas is his translation of the *Iliad*, which is considered equal to Pope's.

Contemporary with Monti, though a good deal younger, was **Ugo Foscolo** (1777–1827). This celebrated writer and patriot was born in the island of Zante, his father being a Venetian and his mother a Greek. He was sent as a student to the University of Padua, where he attended Cesarotti's lectures on the classics. At the age of seventeen he produced a tragedy in the style of Alfieri, which was acted at Venice. Foscolo threw himself with the utmost enthusiasm into the revolutionary movement, took service in the army, and was present at Genoa when that city was invested by the allies. At twenty-nine, in the room of Monti, he was elected Professor of Literature at Pavia. A few years later he caused a

tragedy, *Ajace*, to be played, in which the authorities detected various distasteful allusions, and he was ordered to quit the kingdom. He then betook himself to Tuscany, but eventually, as he found it impossible to adapt himself to the new conditions, went to live in England, where, thirteen years after, he died, at the age of fifty.

During the course of his troubled life, Foscolo was the author of many works. One of the most popular was his *Jacopo Ortis*, the Italian 'Sorrows of Werther.' Ortis, however, is a much finer character than his German prototype, for whereas Werther falls a victim to his own unhappy passion, Foscolo's hero is no mere sentimental swain. Grief for the misfortunes of his country is added, as the motive of his sacrifice, to the pang of unsuccessful love. *Jacopo Ortis* was felt to be a great book, but it had one defect which caused its writer, subsequently, severe compunction, namely, a negligent style. Foscolo's chef d'œuvre is a lyrical poem, *I Sepolcri*. Before writing it, and soon after the publication of *Ortis*, he made proof of his powers in two noble odes in honour of Luigia Pallavicini. As for *I Sepolcri*, the cause which immediately inspired it was Foscolo's indignation with the great people of Milan for allowing the remains of Parini to be mingled in a common burial-ground with those of robbers deposited there by the public executioner. The composition has every merit which such a lyric should have — choice vocabulary, robust style, and ever increasing animation and fire. It was read by Bettinelli and Monti, and both pronounced it a masterpiece.

The peculiar feature in *I Sepolcri* is the wonderful way in which Foscolo, whilst drawing his images from ancient literature, vivifies them with his own emotions and weds them to the circumstances of the hour. It is this which differences

I Sepolcri from the frigid and artificial imitations of Pindar, which had been current during three centuries, and accredits it as real poetry. Following up his success Foscolo designed three other lyrical compositions, the most notable being his poem *Le Grazie*. Of this, however, only fragments were published. Personal anxieties and the disturbed condition of public affairs in Italy did not leave him the requisite ease and leisure for carrying his intentions into effect. To these causes must be added his high sense of the dignity of his vocation, in which he has scarcely an equal either in ancient or modern times, and which made him a rigorous censor of his own performances. The result was that he projected a large number of great works, including a translation of the Iliad, which he never completed.

Foscolo, despite his achievements in lyric poetry, was not particularly successful in the drama. In this department the best that can be said of him is that of all Alfieri's followers he is the most like him. His sonnets, on the contrary, in which he took Casa as a model, are better than those of Alfieri, and some of them, from their passion and strength, are as popular as *I Sepolcri*. Two more works of Foscolo may be mentioned, his translation of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and his satire entitled *Ipercalissi di Didimo Chierico, profeta minimo*. The latter is an animated protest, in the style of the biblical writers, against the scholars of the peninsula for betraying the cause of their country. Had not Foscolo himself however supplied the key, the allusions would have remained excessively obscure. In England Foscolo was a frequent contributor to the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review*, for which he wrote critical studies on Dante and his age, and thereby did much to advance the knowledge of Italian literature in his adopted country. Moved also by sympathy for

the Greeks in their struggle for independence he began a work on Homer, but before he had time to finish it, died, it is to be feared, of sheer misery.

Before ending this account of the revolutionary era, it will be proper to advert to two other writers—**Ippolito Pindemonti** and **Giovanni Fantoni**. Pindemonti (1753–1828) made himself famous by his lovely rendering of the Odyssey. Apart from this he is chiefly celebrated for his rustic poems; and his verse, tinged with gentle melancholy, has gained for him the name of the Italian Tibullus. Fantoni (1759–1807), better known by his *nom de guerre* Labindo, wrote lyrical poetry after Horace, but, with the exception of a few odes inspired by political subjects, his imitations cannot be termed felicitous.

CHAPTER XII.

ROMANTICISM AND PESSIMISM.

It is proposed to deal in this chapter with two phases of sentiment, which, though universal or rather, it might be said, incidental to the common human spirit, received special expression in Italy at the hands of two writers both intellectually gigantesque, but in other respects as wide asunder as the poles—**Alessandro Manzoni** and **Giacomo Leopardi.** As a lesson in psychology it is interesting to note the effects on these master minds of external conditions. To neither was the outlook bright, but Manzoni, always serene, always hopeful, armed himself with patience and, his eyes having seen the salvation of Italy, departed, very painfully alas! so recently as 1873. Leopardi, on the other hand, vexed by intolerable contradictions, in vain but ceaseless revolt against nature, imperfectly equipped in the struggle for existence, the victim of a sort of moral hydrocephalus, perished of actual dropsy, before he was quite forty years of age.

Of the two Manzoni was the elder. He was born March 7, 1785, and was the son of Pietro Manzoni and Giulia Beccaria, daughter of the famous economist. Beyond the bare gift of existence (not a *δῶρον ἄδωρον* as it proved in this case) Manzoni would seem to have owed very little to his father. The latter was a stern unbending martinet, possessing but few attractions for his lovely and accomplished wife, who

in 1795 left him, and took up her abode with Carlo Imbonati, a friend of Parini, at Paris. Alessandro's preferences were all for her and his maternal grandfather, of which fact he afforded clear testimony by signing himself for a time Manzoni Beccaria. With regard to his education it is worth notice that one of his earliest teachers was **Soave**, author of the highly edifying *Novelle Morali*. Subsequently in the Collegio Longone he came under the influence of the Barnabites. In the light of his after-career these circumstances may well seem pre-destined. This at least may be said, that the writer of *I Promessi Sposi*, with his pure character and ecclesiastical bias, could scarcely have fallen on a more fitting initiation.

Like others of his craft—it is superfluous, though very apposite, to mention Scott—Manzoni began with verse. His *primitiae* consisted of four cantos in terza rima, describing a vision, and the poem had for name *Il Trionfo della Libertà*. It was modelled on the *Bassvilliana* and *Mascheroniana* of Vincenzo Monti, for whom, in the conclusion, he speaks a boundless reverence:—'*io te seguo da lunge*.' The life of Manzoni is distinguished by its renunciations, and when he embraced romanticism, there were features in the *Trionfo* which did not commend themselves to him. And yet, in his mature judgment, it was not altogether bad. He spurned, indeed, and refused to father the swelling phrase and garnishing of false gods—Peace and War and Equality—but the soul of the poem, the *puro e virile animo* dowering it, this he continued to accept. His next essay was an idyll, entitled *Adda*, which he dedicated to Monti. It was written in blank verse, and with much finish. Both poems were composed when Manzoni was between fifteen and nineteen years of age.

Imbonati having died, Alessandro joined his mother in Paris. Here he was introduced to the literary celebrities of the capital in the *salon* of Madame Condorcet, and his ideas received a certain French colouring which characterized them to the last. In order to console his mother, who felt her loss keenly, he indited verses *A Carlo Imbonati*. These verses are strongly reminiscent of Petrarch, and the sentiments which they express are conveyed in the familiar forms of a vision and a dialogue. Though of an elevated tone, they are without the note afterwards so distinctive of his art—religiousness. In 1809 he printed a mythological poem *Urania*, having for its *motif* the ministry of poetry as a civilizing and reforming agent. The critics of the day were not slow to belaud these attempts. Monti is said to have observed, in reference to Manzoni, 'I should like to end as this stripling has begun'; while Foscolo did him the honour to insert some lines of the ode to Imbonati in his notes on *I Sepolcri*.

In spite of this flattery the time was almost come for Manzoni to quit the ranks of the classicists. The mythology which entered so largely into their method he began to feel as irksome and unreal,—to use his own expression, it was 'absolutely devoid of interest'; and in a letter dated the 6th of September, 1809, he wrote to Fouriel promising to make no more verses of the sort. Already, in 1808, he had married a perfect ideal of womanhood, the daughter of a rich Protestant banker; and her conversion to Catholicism was soon followed by that of her husband, who had been to a great extent a freethinker. The gain to literature from this event was a series of sublime *Inni* in honour of the great Christian festivals—*La Resurrezione*, *Il Nome di Maria*, *Il Natale*, *La Passione*, and lastly, born as it were out of due time, *La Pentecoste*. At the time of their first publication, which was the year 1815,

the *Inni* were received rather coldly, but this indifference was replaced, as their merits were more clearly recognized, by a crescendo of admiration. His *Osservazioni sulla Morale Cattolica*, written in answer to Sismondi and published in 1819, is a torso which he wanted either the leisure or the inclination to complete.

Meanwhile, as a romanticist, Manzoni had not been idle. Before essaying anything original, he conscientiously prepared himself for his mission by an elaborate study of mediaeval history, with the double object of appropriating its treasures and drinking in its spirit. The fruits of his labour were mainly these: *Il Conte di Carmagnola*, a tragedy published in 1820, *Adelchi*, also a tragedy, published in 1822, and the celebrated historical novel, *I Promessi Sposi*, begun in 1821 and published by instalments between 1824 and 1827. All three works were commended by Goethe, then in the plenitude of his fame. His judgment on *I Promessi Sposi* was especially gratifying. He said it was the perfection of its kind; and Sir Walter, with more reasons for being reserved, placed it in point of excellence before any of his own novels. It was generous estimate—too generous perhaps for later criticism to endorse. A number of smaller works issued from Manzoni's pen at this time. Such were the revolutionary ode *Cinque Maggio*, written in 1821, but not published till 1848: a magnificent ode on the death of Napoleon, published in 1822 and adequately rendered by Goethe himself into German: and two letters, to Chauvet and the Marchese Cesare d'Azeglio respectively, on Romanticism. In 1827 he stayed for some months at Florence, where he was received with great distinction by the Grand-duke Leopold and formed the acquaintance of Leopardi. His visit, however, was dictated by a practical motive. Him-

self a Lombard, he wished to give impartial consideration to the question of language which had been so long a subject of dispute to his countrymen, and to which henceforth his attention was chiefly directed. His ultimate conclusion was that in the interests of Italian literature the Tuscan dialect must prevail. In 1845 he addressed a letter on the subject to Giacinto Carrena, and in 1868 appeared a full and final exposition of his theory in his report *Dell' Unità della Lingua e de' Mezzi di diffonderla*, which he drew up at the request of the Minister, Emilio Broglio.

In the sphere of creative art, Manzoni closed his career with *I Promessi Sposi*, which he re-published purged of Lombardisms in 1840. With it was printed an historical notice entitled *Storia della Colonne Infame*. As Manzoni's great novel had been styled *Storia Milanese Scoperta e Rifatta*, many expected in the sequel a new work of fiction. Bitter, therefore, was the disappointment when it was found to be a dry recital, larded with original documents and interesting only to professed students. In 1833 Manzoni lost his wife, and in 1834 his eldest daughter Giulia. Although on the advice of his friends he married again, it is scarcely a fanciful thought that it was these dolorous bereavements that robbed him of his inspiration. He survived, however, for forty years, dying at last of inflammation of the brain in his native Milan.

Having thus indicated the main divisions of Manzoni's life and the order of his works, it will be proper to examine the latter a little more in detail. With regard to his juvenile poems, it is unnecessary to add anything to what has already been said. The *Inni* present that union of grandeur and simplicity implied by the epithet 'sublime.' They are full of the loftiest symbolism. The idea, for instance, shadowed forth in *Il Natale* is Christian democracy—the equality of all

in the sight of God; and again in *La Resurrezione* he typifies the triumph of innocence over oppression. In his lyrics also Manzoni is the champion of a transcendental morality. Injustice and tyranny are revolting to him, being contraventions of the divine appointment whereby all men are brothers. In *Il Conte di Carmagnola* the theme is internal discord issuing in thraldom, and *Adelchi* contains a fresh dissuasion against oppression, on the ground that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. He also admonishes his countrymen that it is futile to look for deliverance by the foreigner.

All or most of these ideas are pourtrayed over again on the larger canvas of *I Promessi Sposi*, with the added thought of Christian forgiveness. This novel is a splendid masterpiece, remarkable both for nobility of sentiment and profusion of detail. But it suffers from excessive ideality. It is in truth a kind of monochrome. The characters, where they are not stagey unrealities, are so many disguises of the author. The same accusation touches, of course, Milton and Byron. Even the Satan of *Paradise Lost* is but a fallen Milton, while Byron, in his various parts as Don Juan, Childe Harold, and the Giaour, is a very Proteus in verse. But there is yet another consideration. Manzoni is a greater Soave, and never for a moment loses sight of his moral. The result is seen in his character-drawing. Fra Cristoforo and the Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, we feel, are scarcely flesh and blood or, if they are, they are 'men with growing wings,' not likenesses of ourselves; while Don Rodrigo is so arrant a villain that it is to be hoped, for the credit of humanity, that he does not belong to the category of real existences. With the minor personages it is different. Some of them are extremely life-like. Agnese and her gossip, in particular, are excellent portraiture. The story has been sometimes blamed

for its digressions—the account of the plague, the garden-scene, &c. Technically these may be faults, but he would be a bold critic who should propose to expunge descriptions wrought with such pleasing pre-Raffaelite distinctness.

Singularly enough Manzoni himself, unmoved by the benediction of the great Goethe, fell foul of his own offspring. Just as he had renounced Monti and mythology, so now he abjured the historical novel, which he pronounced an impossible hybrid confounding the properties of history and fiction. These, he maintained, could only co-exist in the popular legend. Whatever may be thought of Manzoni's doctrine, he at least was loyal to it. *I Promessi Sposi* was the alpha and omega of his works of fiction.

Although Manzoni was its most eminent exponent, he cannot with any truth be termed the apostle of Romanticism, even as regards Italy. The first to set it forth was **Giovanni Berchet** in his *Lettera semiseria di Grisostomo sul Cacciatore Feroce e sulla Eleonora*, published in 1816. Nor again was *I Promessi Sposi* the first historical romance. That honour must be assigned to *Il Castello di Trezzo*, a work of **G. B. Bazzoni** (1803–1850), who afterwards produced *Il Falco della Rupe*, in which it is easy to trace the influence of Manzoni. An avowed imitation is *La Monaca di Monza*, being a continuation of *I Promessi Sposi*. This daring feat was attempted in the year 1828 by **Giovanni Rosini** (1776–1855), a professor in the University of Pisa, and it is undeniable that he achieved considerable success. The numerous editions of his work attest its popularity, for even to this day it has not ceased to be read. Rosini dealt with the artistic and literary side of Italian life, and his delineations display some skill. They are burdened, however, by a load of erudition and interspersed with wearisome digressions.

One of the most worthy and accomplished of Manzoni's followers was his son-in-law, **Massimo Zaparelli d'Azeglio** (1798–1866). He was not only an author, but an artist and a soldier. He was also a prominent politician and promoted the liberation of Italy by his writings. His novels are *La Disfida di Barletta; Niccolò de' Lapi*, treating of the siege of Florence and, more celebrated than either, *Fanfulla*. This last is a sort of popular *Don Quixote*. As a writer D'Azeglio is eminently temperate, and is at his best in description. He was not a profound thinker, nor, to judge from his writings, was he over-stocked with historical information, but his tales show good sense, imagination, and facility of execution.

More dramatic as a writer and vehement as a man, **Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi** (1804–1873) exposed himself to the utmost fury of the storm, endured imprisonment and exile, in defence of his cherished principles, democracy and Italian independence. He wrote a variety of works of fiction, of which the most notable are *La Battaglia di Benevento*, published in 1827, *L'Assedio di Firenze*, which is his masterpiece, *Veronica Cybo*, *Isabella Orsini*, and *Beatrice Cenci*. Guerrazzi is remarkable for the uncompromising tone, the ferocity of his writings. To tell the truth, this is considerably overdone, and the absence of softer effects is largely accountable for the oblivion which has so swiftly overtaken them. In addition to his novels Guerrazzi produced several works of a nature more strictly historical: such as *Pasquale Paoli*, *Francesco Ferrucio*, *Andrea Doria*. His best composition *Il Secolo che muore* was published after his death.

All these writers, not excepting Manzoni, were of the liberal school, but conservatism also had its representatives in fiction—notably **Padre Antonio Bresciani** (1708–1862),

well known as a contributor to *La Civiltà Cattolica.* Bresciani, it should be said, was a linguist and antiquary as well as a novelist. His best romance is *L'Ebreo di Verona*, which, though not very happily designed, is in high esteem for its vivid descriptions and the beauty of the style. It would be clearly impossible to mention all the writers who are to-day carrying on the traditions of Manzoni, and to single out one or two would be invidious. If, however, exception is to be made, it must be in favour of Edmondo de Amicis, a distinguished contemporary *littérateur*, who was born in 1846 and is still therefore in his prime. His fame depends principally on his sketches of military life, but he is equally at home in works of travel, history, biography, and the society novel. De Amicis' chief faculty is observation, but he is incurably superficial, and this grave fault endangers the permanence of his reputation. It is noticeable that De Amicis as a young man was personally known to Manzoni, and the latter, recognizing his talents, gave him his warm support and encouragement.

Romantic literature, however, was not confined to the prose novel. There was also the tale in verse and the *romanza* or romantic lyric, derived, like the novel, from the bosom of the middle ages and designed to illuminate and instruct. The whole of this literature was so clearly dominated by Manzoni that it has been named after him—Manzonian; and the leaders of the school, **Giovanni Torti, Tommasso Grossi, Giovanni Berchet, Samuele Biava, Silvio Pellico,** were his intimate friends.

Torti, the eldest of them (1788–1854), was more of a critic than a poet. He won his spurs by his *Epistola sui Sepolcri del Foscolo e del Pindemonti*, published in 1808, and ten years later appeared his *Sermoni sulla Poesia*, an ex-

position and defence of romanticism. His poem *Scetticismo e Fede* is a metrical discourse on religion, not altogether unlike Wordsworth's *Excursion*. The central figure in it is an old peasant woman, to whom Christianity is all in all. Torti, though a good, was not a voluminous writer; his verses were described by Manzoni as '*pochi e valenti*'—'few and full of worth.'

Grossi (1791–1853) was not only a friend of Manzoni, but actually resided for fifteen years in his house. A curious fact connected with him was his abdication of literature, when he had already achieved his success in it, and his adoption of the unambitious life of a notary. This conduct was not so irrational as might at first appear, being accompanied by the solid rewards of a well-filled coffer and domestic felicity. Here it will only be necessary to dwell on the earlier and more brilliant portion of his career. Grossi made his *début* with *La Prineide*, a satire in the dialect of Milan, which got him into trouble with the Government. This was in the year 1815. His next work was a romance, *La Fuggitiva*, originally in the same dialect, and afterwards transformed into literary Italian. In 1820 he published a tale, *Ildegonda*, relating to the times of the second Lombard league, and written in ottava rima. Another poem in fifteen cantos, *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata*, appeared in 1826. This was also in ottava rima, of which Grossi had a great mastery. Excellent as this poem is in the descriptive passages, Grossi unquestionably errs by conforming too closely to historical realities. Thus it is that the glamour with which Tasso invested his incomparably greater work is wholly wanting to *I Lombardi*. In 1834 Grossi gave to the world an historical novel, *Marco Visconti*, a manifest copy of *I Promessi Sposi*, and dedicated to Manzoni. Lastly, in

1837, he produced a poetical romance *Ulrico e Lida.* Without entering upon details it may be observed that the burden in all these works is the same—disappointment in love.

Ildegonda had a rival in *La Pia de' Tolomei*, the work of a Tuscan *improvisatore*, **Bartolomeo Sestini.**

Berchet, already mentioned as the author of perhaps the first historical novel written in Italian, composed also odes and romances which earned for him the name of the Italian Tyrtaeus. Especially noticeable is the romance entitled *I Profughi di Parga*, a record of English perfidy and English generosity, and *Fantasia*, the most beautiful of all his compositions. It is a matter for regret that Berchet, despite his prolific imagination and virile thought, possessed such a feeble sense of poetic form. But for this he might have attained to considerably higher rank. He was a diligent translator of German and English poetry.

Samuele Biava (1792–1870) is best known by his *Melodie Liriche*, published in 1820, and his versions of the Canticles and Psalms.

Silvio Pellico (1788–1854) first sprang into notice through his tragedies, one of which, *Francesca da Rimini*, was translated by Byron; but he gained a wider and more lasting reputation by *Le Mie Prigioni*, an autobiography. In 1820 he had been implicated in the doings of the Carbonari, and on the suppression of their conspiracy by the Austrians was committed to the fortress of Spielberg, where he lay for ten years. *Le Mie Prigioni*, which was published in 1832, is the transcript of his experiences. The work became popular and has been translated into all the languages of Europe, an honour which it well deserves. In 1834 Pellico put forth a manual of moral philosophy, entitled

Doveri degli Uomini. There is no real divorce between the two works, for, though the former is necessarily the more pictorial, yet both breathe a severe and lofty enthusiasm and are marked by simplicity and candour. The same qualities distinguish his *Epistolario.* In conjunction with *Le Mie Prigioni* should be read the *Addizioni* of Piero Maroncelli and Adryane's *Mémoires d'un Prisonnier.* The *Memorie e Lettere* of **Federico Confalonieri**, which were published in 1891, are probably the latest addition to this class of writing, the author being one of those singularly pure and heroic characters which adorn an otherwise gloomy page of Italian history.

Gaol literature, however, has only an incidental connexion with romance. To conclude what is fitting to be said on the latter subject: **Cesare Cantù**, who was born in 1805 and still survives in a revered old age, published in 1826 a tale in ottava rima, consisting of four cantos, and entitled *Algiso o la Lega Lombarda.* In 1831 he produced a commentary on *I Promessi Sposi*, which he called *La Lombardia nel Secolo XVII.* Two years later interference in politics led to his incarceration. During his twelve months' seclusion he worked at an historical novel, *Margherita Pusterla*, which recalls in many of its particulars *I Promessi Sposi* and contains in Bonvicino a replica as it were of Padre Cristoforo. Owing to difficulties with the Austrian censor who perceived its application, it was five years before the tale could emerge from obscurity. Finally, **Giulio Carcano** (1812–1884) wrote some admirable stories (of which *Angiola Maria* is the most popular), sundry poems, and the best translation of Shakespeare.

Giacomo Leopardi, in all but genius the very antilogy of Manzoni, was born in the year 1798, at Recanati.

His father Monaldo, a gentleman of the old school, was a man of talent and culture, writing, in addition to *Dialogetti* on current politics, an autobiography, which has since been re-published. The eldest of the family, Giacomo, a sickly precocious boy, spent most of his time in the seclusion of a well-stocked library. This habit of poring over books, acting on a feeble constitution, made him round-shouldered, indeed, a humpback: and when in after years he mingled in society and realized the full extent of his deformity, the thought of it ate into his mind like a cancer, poisoning the springs of happiness and making his domestication in the world impossible. In the chorus of universal nature he was 'a jarring and a dissonant thing,' and his singing was an everlasting Woe! True, there was pessimism before Leopardi. The sad undertone which pervades the glorious poesy of Greece, with its mournful insistence on the brief and trivial life of man, his fading joys and the growing shadow of a stern resistless Fate—what is this but pessimism? And in Italy Fosçolo had already defined the anguish of a soul intense in its aspirations, but hidebound by circumstance. Indeed, the flower of the race has a constant temptation to repine in the disproportion of life to genius. It has been reserved, however, for the German Schopenhauer to condense these humours into a philosophy.

As for Leopardi, his distinction, his dire necessity, is to have symbolized, to have *lived* pessimism. He commenced author in 1812 with a tragedy in three acts, to which he gave the name of *Pompeo in Egitto*. This was followed in 1814 by a little treatise *Degli Errori popolari degli Antichi*, and after an interval of two more years he wrote a poem in terza rima, bearing the significant title *Appressamento della Morte*. It is noticeable that up to this time he was still

accessible to the consolations of religion, though tasting in anticipation all the bitterness of a premature death and the attendant loss of fame. Leopardi's Italian studies—especially the *Trionfi* of Petrarch and the Divine Comedy—manifest themselves not only in the form of the poem, but in its tone and substance. His angel appears to warn him of his approaching end, and the figures of Love, Error, Avarice, War, Oblivion, typify the unworth of the world; while in the background a company of blessed spirits, David and Alighieri, Petrarch and Tasso, Christ and Mary, cheer him with the hope of an everlasting to be.

Towards the close of the same year 1816 in which this threnody was composed, Leopardi met with a misfortune, which left a painful impression and confirmed him in the melancholy to which he was naturally prone. He fell in love with Giovanna Cassi, a cousin of his father, but lacked courage for an avowal. Judging from his subsequent failures, it is unlikely that he would have succeeded, and in that respect his silence was immaterial. The pang, however, remained, and his feelings as influenced by this event are touchingly portrayed in two elegies, in one of which he describes himself in concentric phrase as *a pianger nato.* Leopardi, like all poets, was very susceptible to feminine charm, but invariably, owing to his personal defects, his affections went unrequited, than which it is hard to conceive a more cruel dispensation. In these his early days he used to watch through his window the peasant girls in the neighbouring houses, and rave about them in amatory verse, but there the thing ended; and in later life he succumbed to the fascinations of several ladies, whose identity is in no doubt.

Meanwhile Leopardi was pursuing a brilliant career in

letters. He contributed to the *Spettatore*, a Milan magazine, some essays in translation, a hymn to Neptune he professed to have rendered from the Greek, and two original Greek odes, which, Chatterton-like, he put off on Anacreon. In 1818 he published two canzonets, *Italia* and *Monumento di Dante in Firenze*. This he dedicated to Monti, who, in reply, expressed his joy at 'seeing a new star arise in our Parnassus.' Like Goethe in similar case, Leopardi burned to escape from the narrow orbit of municipal Recanati. Beyond the mountains he thought he could breathe freely, and fulfil the high destiny to which he felt himself called. At length the opportunity came. He found himself in the gay society of Rome. But here also he was out of his element, being disgusted with the frivolous people who crowded the assemblies. As some compensation he made the acquaintance of Niebuhr and other distinguished foreigners, by whom his great abilities were duly appreciated. In 1824 he returned to his native place, and published a collected edition of his poems, together with a dissertation in which he defended himself from anticipated criticisms on the score of language. His subsequent efforts were a *Martirio dei Santi Padri* in the style of the Trecentists; an *Interpretazione delle Rime del Petrarca*, in which he confines himself to the humble task of expounding the significance of the words; a portion of his *Operette Morali*; a *Crestomazia Italiana* compiled for the practical object of the improvement of style; and a new edition of his *Canti*, dedicated to his friends in Tuscany.

Looking at the matter from the common standpoint, Leopardi had been deplorably unsuccessful. What with his ill-health and blind devotion to his studies, he had shown small aptitude for taking care of himself, and had been

driven on more than one occasion to seek the shelter of the paternal roof. During the last four years of his life, however, Leopardi was destined to see some gleams of sunshine. In 1830, when at Florence, he had come to know Antonio Ranieri, a Neapolitan scholar, who, compassionating his misery, took him into his home. There he received every attention from Ranieri himself and his amiable sister, and there, in the arms of his friend, the unfortunate poet expired on the 14th of June, 1837, having added to his list two last works, *Pensieri* and *Paralipomeni alla Batracomiomachia.*

Although Leopardi himself always strenuously denied that his opinions were formed from personal considerations, this is scarcely the view of his biographers. The full horror of the case did not burst upon him at once. In his lyrical poems especially it is possible to mark three stages of ever-deepening gloom. In his earliest compositions, whilst recognizing the unsatisfactoriness of things, he is disposed to attribute it to accident, to the degeneracy of the human race, the frauds of civilization, &c. Then, advancing a step, he fixes the blame on human nature itself, which is so constituted that it can never attain happiness. In the last place he paints in terrible colours Woe itself, and hurls bitter gibes against God and Nature as the authors of it. As has been observed, pessimism with Leopardi is a habit of mind, a sentiment, not an ordered system of thought. Even in his prose works, his *Operette Morali*, he shows himself no dry philosopher. The forms which he employs vary from dialogue to myth, from allegory to satire, but he is always terribly in earnest. He opens every little scratch, and probes, if he does not poison, the wounds of suffering humanity. Yet in all this he is the reverse of a fanatic. He argues dexterously, in the finest of literary styles.

Leopardi is, indeed, the first modern Italian classic: no such prose as his has been written since the *cinquecento*. As a thinker, he may be named with Vico and Bruno.

Leopardi's works are so numerous that they cannot here be studied in detail. One of the most notable is his *Paralipomeni alla Batracomiomachia*, a poem consisting of eight cantos in ottava rima. As the name implies it is based on the old pseudo-Homeric poem, of which Leopardi seems to have been especially fond, and of which he had already produced two versions in sextains. The work is a political satire dealing with events in Naples between 1815 and 1821; and Leopardi, as usual, is a very Ishmael, attacking both the reactionaries and the liberals, the latter indeed with peculiar keenness, because of their foolish confidence. Lastly, Leopardi was distinguished as a translator. Besides his verse renderings, which were chiefly juvenile essays, he did into Italian parts of Xenophon, Isocrates, Epictetus, &c.; and his correspondence, though often necessarily sad, is full of interest for those who would know the man.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EPILOGUE.

From 1830 to 1860 the general characteristic of Italian literature, however diversified in other respects, was its subservience to politics. A recent writer has classified the productions of the age on this basis, pointing out the effects of the various forms of government—Austrian rule, Papal influence, and Bourbon tyranny—on authorship in their respective spheres. Here it will be convenient to adopt another method of classification, and to regard the various works from a purely literary point of view. Romance, radiating from Milan, has been already dealt with. Satire and dialectal poetry had also its votaries. Of these the most famous, at any rate at Milan, was **Carlo Porta** (1776–1821), a friend of Manzoni. His example was followed by a Roman, **Giuseppe Giaocchino Belli** (1791–1863), who, admirable alike for his wit and command of dialect, directed his keen and strongly sped shafts at the Papacy; while **Angelo Brofferio**, an advocate and the author of dramatic and historical compositions, won a wide popularity by his *Stella del Piemount*, written in the speech of that province. In Tuscany **Antonio Guadagnoli** (1798–1858), a native of Arezzo, indulged his wit at the expense of the great ones of the earth, and his humour, being without malice, was much appreciated.

Guadagnoli, however, was completely cast into the shade by that most versatile and prolific of authors, **Giuseppe Giusti** (1809–1850). After an elaborate education, of which the last years were passed in the University of Pisa, Giusti threw himself into literature, commencing with *Guigliottina a Vapore*, which was levelled at the bigot Duke of Modena. This was followed, on the occasion of the death of Francis I of Austria, by *Dies Irae*, and afterwards by *Lo Stivale*, a farcical history of Italy under the similitude of a boot. A succession of works of the most various character provided him with occupation during the remainder of his comparatively short life. In *Re Travicello* he pilloried Leopold II; in *Terra de' Morti*, wielding a two-edged sword, he struck, on the one hand, at Lamartine for his insolent allusions to Italy; on the other, at his own countrymen for their feebleness and corruption. *Preterito più che Perfetto del Verbo Pensare*, *Il Ballo*, and *Brindisi* are writings pointed especially at the aristocracy, those effete and pleasure-loving nobles, whose tameness and submission riveted the yoke of foreign oppression.

But Giusti had no class prejudices. Each section of the community in its turn was made to wince under his powerful lash. The tradesfolk with their base covetous propensities were badly hit in *La Vestizione* and *La Scritta*. In other works he took up his parable against time-servers and place-hunters and political quacks. On the accession of Pius IX to the chair of St. Peter, Giusti, conceiving high hopes for the future of his country, gave expression to his feelings in some exquisite odes—*Sant' Ambrogio*, *Guerra*, *Rassegnazione*. In *Discorsi che corrono*, *Storia Contemporanea*, *Congresso dei Birri*, he makes war on the reactionary party; in *Spettri del 4 Settembre* and *Instruzioni ad un Emissario* is revealed his

distrust of demagogues and the wily supporters of Austria. His *Ode a Leopoldo* is a recantation, wherein he commends the Emperor for his liberalism. Liberalism, however, as Giusti discovered, has its weak as well as its strong side, and his sonnets, *I Più tirano i Meno*, *Maggiorità*, *Arruffapopoli*, testify to his dislike of the noisy and inexperienced politicians—deputies, journalists, and others—who were springing into notoriety. With all his passion for liberty Giusti had no love for republicanism, and his avoidance of extremes was productive of no small inconvenience to him. But it was not fated that he should live long in a world which, for him, was evidently out of joint. He died, after a protracted illness, from the bursting of a blood-vessel, March 31, 1850.

Giusti did not belong to any particular school. He held equally aloof from a cold forbidding classicism and a recklessly innovating romanticism. He borrowed some hints from Béranger, but the development of his ideas appears to have proceeded from factors in his own experience. Of this a good account is given in *L'Origine degli Scherzi*, from which it would seem that he began life as a follower of Petrarch, *belando d'amore*; but he suffered a rude awakening from these dreams when he perceived that the world was full of *pagliacci*, men of straw, superficial and glozing hypocrites. His first sensation was that of horror; afterwards 'wrath, sorrow, amazement was dissolved in laughter.' From what he says however elsewhere, the laughter was only apparent, while the grief which it served to mask was genuine and sincere. Giusti was anything but a vulgar satirist. As a rule he carefully eschewed personalities; if it happened to him to be overtaken by a fault, he repented in sackcloth and ashes. The lyrical element in his being, though under some restraint, finds expression in such odes as *All' Amica lontana*,

Fiducia in Dio, *Ad una Giovinetta*, &c. Giusti was also interested in philology, and made a collection of Tuscan proverbs; and he was an enthusiastic lover of Virgil, Dante, and Parini.

The period comprised between 1830 and 1870 was exceedingly prolific in poets, of whom little more than a bare list can be here given. One school, whose headquarters were in Umbria, Romagna, and Le Marche, followed the lead of Leopardi in regard to purity of language and elegance of style. **Giovanni Marchetti** (1790–1852) is celebrated as the author of *Una Notte di Dante*, a short but exquisite poem in terza rima, describing a famous episode, Dante's arrival at the monastery of Fonte Avellana. **Terenzio Mamiani** (1799–1885) composed *Inni Sacri*, treating of the lives of the saints and written in blank verse; and *Idillj*, a medley of stories and sketches, in various metres. Another disciple of Leopardi was **Agostino Cagnoli** of Reggio d' Emilia (1810–1846). In his *Scala di Vita*, **L. Grisostomo Ferrucci** (1797–1877) sought to rival the grandeurs of the Divine Comedy. Being such an ambitious attempt it was but natural that there should be differences of opinion respecting it, but the poem is now in a fair way to be forgotten. A kinswoman of Grisostomo, **Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci** (1803–1887), was an ardent educationalist and a poetess of no mean order. Belonging to the Roman branch of the classical school were the brothers **Giambattista** and **Giuseppe Maccari** (1832–1868), idyllists, and **Francesco Massi**, author of lyrical, satirical, and epic verses. Midway between the classicists and romanticists must be placed **Antonio Peretti** of Castelnuovo (1815–1858), at first court-poet of the Duke of Modena, and then exile for love of country. At Camposanto, near Modena,

was born towards the end of the last century **Pietro Giannone**, the poet of the Carboneria and a conspirator of the deepest dye. His chief works were *La Repubblica*, which he dedicated to Giusti and *L' Esule*, wherein he sets forth the manners and morals of his sect. He died in 1872.

The most notable poet in southern Italy was **Gabriele Rossetti** (1783–1854), who, unable to accept the conditions on which alone life could be lived at Naples, removed to London, where he held a chair of Italian Literature. In his adopted country he published political and other verses, the greatest of his compositions being *Iddio e l'Uomo, Il Veggente in Solitudine* and *L'Arpa Evangelica.* The last was written as a solace for his blindness. Rossetti had strong notions about the Papacy, and wrote several treatises, in which he laboured to prove that Dante and all the poets of the middle ages hated Rome, and that their writings are so many adumbrations of this hate. To-day Rossetti is remembered more for his noble personal life than his poetical achievements, but the name has been rendered imperishable by the triumphs of his richly gifted children. The neighbourhood of Trent produced a notable poet—styled by Carducci 'the last of the troubadours'—in **Giovanni Prati** (1815–1884), who, at the age of twenty-six, drew attention to himself by his *Ermenegarda*, a tale in blank verse. His writings consist mainly of ballads, religious verses, patriotic and satirico-allegorical compositions, and a philosophic poem. The last is entitled *Armanda*, and its subject is scepticism, which it confutes. Finally he published two volumes, *Iside* and *Psyche*, embodying in a series of lyrics, as the result of introspection, the history of his own soul.

The most eminent poets of the Venetian school were **Niccolò Tommaseo** of Sebenico (1802–1874), **Francesco**

dall' Ongaro (1808–1874), **Aleardo Aleardi** of Verona (1812–1878), and **Giacomo Zanella** (1820–1888). **Tommaseo** was at once philosopher, critic, and philologer; and he has left behind him works illustrative of all his studies. As might be expected in the case of so many-sided a writer, his verse is not remarkable for its bulk. What there is of it is romantic in spirit and classical in style. **Francesco dall' Ongaro** was professor of dramatic literature at Florence and Naples. The most popular of his works is *I Stornelli*. **Aleardo Aleardi** is not one of the elect whose writings are destined to be immortal, but *Il Monte Circello*, *Le Prime Storie*, *Lettere a Maria*, and *I Sette Soldati* were once widely read. **Giacomo Zanella**, a priest, was a minor Leopardi. His verses bear witness to a conflict between faith and reason, revelation and science, but the issue in his case was the triumph of religion. Zanella's forte was lyrical poetry, and his best odes will remain landmarks in the art. He showed considerable talent in other directions also, and was a specially good translator of English poetry.

In Tuscany **Luigi Venturi** (1812–1890) gave Italian renderings of the Hymns of the Church; and his masterpiece *L'Uomo* is a set of poems drawn from Biblical narratives and designed to illustrate the inequalities of fortune. The greatest of Italian lyrists now living is, undoubtedly, **Giosue Carducci**, born in 1836 at Valdicastello near Pietrasanta. In the preface to his *Poesie* he gives a sketch of himself down to the year 1871: 'I set out, and I congratulate myself upon it, with Alfieri, Parini, Monti, Foscolo, Leopardi; through them and with them I went back to the ancients, held converse with Dante and Petrarch; and on them I still fixed my eye, even in my travels through foreign literature.' And he goes on to say, 'In *Juvenilia* I am the squire of the

classics; in *Levia Gravia* I keep watch under arms; in *Decennali*, after the first strokes of my lance which were a little conventional and uncertain, I enter upon adventures entirely at my own risk and peril.' After 1871 Carducci appeared in a new character, as a satirist; and in his latest manner—*poesia barbara* he calls it—he bids adieu to rhyme, and takes for pattern the elegy and ode of the ancients. Carducci is strong also in the field of criticism. He has written and published elaborate studies of Italian Literature in its varied phases; and his influence has been far-reaching. English poetry, especially as incarnate in Mr. Swinburne, is signally indebted to Carducci.

In tragedy the greatest name in the first half of the century is **Giovambattista Niccolini** (1782–1861). He was born of Florentine parents at I Bagni di Re, and at the age of one-and-twenty formed a close friendship with Ugo Foscolo, to whom he dedicated *La Chioma di Berenice*. His earliest essays consisted in free translations of Aeschylus; and *Matilde* and *Beatrice Cenci* were inspired by his English studies. Niccolini was one of those who will not allow that there is any generic difference between the ancient and modern drama; and he sought to show how the characteristics of both might be combined. Almost all his works have a political scope. The real subject of *Nabucco* is the fall of Napoleon, while *Giovanni da Procida* and *Ludovico Sforza* are intended to subserve the unity and independence of Italy. *Arnaldo da Brescia* is the most effective blow ever dealt at the Papacy by an Italian pen. Niccolini, without departing from his classical models, improved on them by the variety of his treatment and his fidelity to historic truth. Yet he is by no means perfect. He tends to be lyrical, declamatory; and his knowledge of the human heart is

decidedly circumscribed. In addition to his dramas Niccolini wrote a long series of poems, and he was the author of two not very successful histories, *Vespro Siciliano* and *Storia della Casa Sueva in Italia.* Apart from Niccolini, tragedy at this time can boast of few names of any importance. **Francesco Benedetti** (1785–1821) continued the tradition of Alfieri, basing his plays for the most part on Roman history. **Carlo Marenco** (1800–1846), on the other hand, resorted to the middle ages for his subjects, which he dealt with in a romantic spirit. His best dramas are *Buondelmonte, La Pia* and *Arnaldo da Brescia.* **Pietro Cossa** (1830–1881), a native of Rome, showed considerable skill in portraying historic personages, such as they may be conceived to have been. His *Messalina* is a notable success in this way, but his writings distinctly lack form.

In comedy Goldoni's influence continued to prevail; and **Giovanni Giraud**, a Roman (1776–1834), hit the public taste very palpably with his *Don Desiderio* and *Aio nell' Imbarazzo.* **Alberto Nota** of Torino (1775–1847) was also a favourite in his day, but his plays are never likely to be revived, as they are too general and deficient in warmth and colour. **Tommaso Gherardi** (1815–1881) wrote numerous comedies which are alike spirited and natural: *Il Regno d'Adelaide, Il Padiglione delle Mortelle, Il Vero Blasone,* &c. **Vincenzo Martini** was the author of *La Donna di 40 Anni* and *Il Cavaliere d'Industria;* and in the Florentine dialect were written the very witty *Ciane* of the **Abate G. B. Zannoni** (1774–1832). No one perhaps possessed a fuller acquaintance with historical subjects than **Paolo Giacometti** (1817–1882); and he also wrote plays. The latter are chiefly of the class known as *a tesi,* composed, that is to say, for a special purpose, the discussion of a social problem or the enforcement

of a moral: and the situations are in general rather forced. Nevertheless some of his comedies (*Il Poeta e la Balleria*, for instance) are still esteemed. The most conspicuous figure, however, in comedy during the last half-century is, beyond question, **Paolo Ferrari** of Modena (1822–1889). He devoted himself partly to historic comedy, of which *Goldoni e le sue Sedici Commedie* and *Parini e la Satira* may be taken as samples; partly to the *commedia a tesi*, in which he was fairly successful, depicting with tact and knowledge the foibles of modern society, but over-loading his pages with reflexions, and his countrymen say that his dialogue is not superfine Italian. After a period of neglect the melodrama was raised from its low estate as a mere adjunct of the music to something resembling its former glory by **Felice Romani** of Genoa (1788–1865), a friend of Bellini and Bonizetti.

Turning to prose authors other than writers of fiction, the most illustrious in the first half of the century is the **Conte Cesare Balbo** (1789–1853). Although he experimented with various kinds of writing, tales and tragedy and moral philosophy, his chief success was in history and biography. His *Storia d'Italia*, which professes to be a popularization of Muratori, appeared in 1830. In 1839 he published a very full life of Dante, which, in spite of all that has been since written on the subject, has never been superseded. His *Meditazioni Storiche* deal with the providential aspect of history, while his *Sommario della Storia d'Italia* is inspired by a political motive. His *Speranze d'Italia* is exclusively political, and among other hopes which the author entertained and the Crimean war was destined to disappoint, was the fall of Turkey, which, he thought, would afford scope for Austrian ambition in the East. Nevertheless, Italian independence may in a sense be traced to Turkey's decrepi-

tude, through the accession of Sardinia to the Anglo-French alliance.

Another historian is **Cesare Cantù**, whose earliest effort was a *Storia di Como*, published in 1829. In 1836 appeared the first instalment of his monumental *Storia Universale.* Other writings of his are *Storia de' Cento Anni* and *L'Abate Parini e la Lombardia.* Cantù is not immaculate as to style, and he has been convicted of numerous errors in matters of fact. Both faults, however, may be regarded as venial in view of the hugeness of the canvas he has undertaken to fill. **Michele Amari** of Palermo (1806–1889) wrote a *Storia del Vespro Siciliano*, controverting the popular belief that the famous Vespers were the result of a conspiracy; and a *Storia dei Mussulmani in Sicilia*, a record of four centuries of Arab rule. Amari's writings are a happy blend of the old and new methods of treating history—at once artistic and scientific, dignified and exact. **Gino Capponi** of Florence (1792–1876), great as a writer, was even greater as a man. A liberal and a Catholic, loyal, yet patriotic, he threw his influence invariably into the scale of right. His chief work is his *Storia della Repubblica di Firenze*, composed when he was old and blind. This history took him twenty years to complete, and, though of a popular character, met with the approval of the critics, except in regard to the opening chapters, which were deemed scanty and inadequate.

Luigi Carlo Farini (1812–1866) was the author of a *Storia della Stato Romano dall' Anno* 1814 *al* 1850, and he published two volumes of a *Storia d' Italia* in continuation of that of Botta. Farini, it should be said, sympathized with the aims of Pius IX, and sternly set his face against the prevalent feature of the age, a rabid demagogism in politics. His literary style is excellent. A contemporary of Farini,

Ferdinando Ranalli, born in 1823 and still living, has traversed the same ground in his *Storia Italiana dal* 1846 *al* 1852 ; while in *L'Italia dopo il* 1859 he has sketched a more recent chapter of his country's history. The principles upon which he proceeds are explained and enforced in his *Lezioni di Storia* and *Ammaestramenti di Letteratura*. They consist in adhesion to the old view of history as the handmaid of politics and contempt for romanticist innovation. The following writers also deserve mention: **Luigi Ciampolini**, author of a *Storia del Risorgimento di Grecia;* **Giuseppe Manno**, author of a very excellent *Storia della Sardegna;* **Luigi Cibrario** (1802–1870), a distinguished critic, who, besides his *Economia Politica nel Medio-Evo*, wrote two histories, that of the city of Turin and the monarchy of Savoy; and **Ercole di Voghera**, whose *Storia delle Campagnie di Ventura* and *Storia della Monarchia Piedmontese* are deservedly esteemed. **Atto Vannucci** (1810–1883) is remembered for his *Storia dell' Italia Antica*, and he was the writer of a popular work *I Martiri della Independenza Italiana*. The best known names in ecclesiastical history are those of **Luigi Tosti** of Naples, who was born in 1811, and **Padre Alfonso Capecelatro**, born in 1824, at Marseilles. Finally, **Pasquale Villari** (b. 1827) has written two valuable monographs: *Storia di Girolamo Savonarola* and *Niccolò Machiavelli e i suoi tempi*.

The age has produced a whole crop of memoirs of which it will be sufficient to mention **Marco Minghetti's** *Miei Ricordi;* and there have been numerous works dealing with Italian literature as a whole, and with special topics such as Dante, which it would be irrelevant to discuss here. The same remark will apply to technological works and treatises on philosophy. It will be fitting to conclude this sketch by a reference to **Giuseppe Mazzini** (1805–1872), the hero of

giovane Italia, whose writings influenced so powerfully the destinies of his native land. Patriot however as he was, his aims far outreached the limits of the peninsula, and he is a most eloquent apostle of the humanitarian idea. Dreaming of a universal rèpublic whose centre should be Rome, he figured the future *régime* almost as a theocracy and adopted as his watchword the chivalrous phrase *Dio e popolo*. Hating utilitarianism, he exalted the conception of duty; indeed, the notion of conduct set forth in his tractate *Doveri* is strict, even to austerity. Individualism in art and life was detestable to him, and against it he ever waged a crusade. All his criticisms are based on these persuasions, which permeate and underlie his discussion of matters so rich in interest as Dante's Love of Country, Romance, Botta, and the Philosophy of Music, and Fate in Tragedy.

ERRATA

Page 59, line 5, *for* Guiccardini *read* Guicciardini
" 87, " 24, *for* **Pecchi** *read* **Cecchi**

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